Swords of Mars

Edgar Rice Burroughs

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About Burroughs:

Edgar Rice Burroughs (September 1, 1875 – March 19, 1950) was an American author, best known for his creation of the jungle hero Tarzan, although he also produced works in many genres. Source: Wikipedia

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- *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912)
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- *A Fighting Man of Mars* (1930)
- *The Warlord of Mars* (1918)
- *The Chessmen of Mars* (1922)
- *John Carter and the Giant of Mars* (1940)
- *Thuvia Maid of Mars* (1920)
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PROLOGUE

The moon had risen above the rim of the canyon near the headwaters of the Little Colorado. It bathed in soft light the willows that line the bank of the little mountain torrent and the cottonwood trees beneath which stood the tiny cabin where I had been camping for a few weeks in the White Mountains of Arizona.

I stood upon the little porch of the cabin enjoying the soft beauties of this Arizona night; and as I contemplated the peace and serenity of the scene, it did not seem possible that but a few years before the fierce and terrible Geronimo had stood in this same spot before this self-same cabin, or that generations before that this seemingly deserted canyon had been peopled by a race now extinct.

I had been seeking in their ruined cities for the secret of their genesis and the even stranger secret of their extinction. How I wished that those crumbling lava cliffs might speak and tell me of all that they had witnessed since they poured out in a molten stream from the cold and silent cones that dot the mesa land beyond the canyon.

My thoughts returned again to Geronimo and his fierce Apache warriors; and these vagrant musings engendered memories of Captain John Carter of Virginia, whose dead body had lain for ten long years in some forgotten cave in the mountains not far south of this very spot—the cave in which he had sought shelter from pursuing Apaches.

My eyes, following the pathway of my thoughts, searched the heavens until they rested upon the red eye of Mars shining there in the blue-black void; and so it was that Mars was uppermost in my mind as I turned into my cabin and prepared for a good night's rest beneath the rustling leaves of the cottonwoods, with whose soft and soothing lullaby was mingled the rippling and the gurgling of the waters of the little Colorado.

I was not sleepy; and so, after I had undressed, I arranged a kerosene lamp near the head of my bunk and settled myself for the enjoyment of a gangster story of assassination and kidnaping.

My cabin consists of two rooms. The smaller back room is my bedroom. The larger room in front of it serves all other purposes,

being dining room, kitchen, and living room combined. From my bunk, I cannot see directly into the front room. A flimsy partition separates the bedroom from the living room. It consists of rough-hewn boards that in the process of shrinking have left wide cracks in the wall, and in addition to this the door between the two rooms is seldom closed; so that while I could not see into the adjoining room, I could hear anything that might go on within it.

I do not know that I am more susceptible to suggestion than the average man; but the fact remains that murder, mystery, and gangster stories always seem more vivid when I read them alone in the stilly watches of the night.

I had just reached the point in the story where an assassin was creeping upon the victim of kidnappers when I heard the front door of my cabin open and close and, distinctly, the clank of metal upon metal.

Now, insofar as I knew, there was no one other than myself camped upon the headwaters of the Little Colorado; and certainly no one who had the right to enter my cabin without knocking.

I sat up in my bunk and reached under my pillow for the .45 Colt automatic that I keep there.

The oil lamp faintly illuminated my bedroom, but its main strength was concentrated upon me. The outer room was in darkness, as I could see by leaning from my bunk and peering through the doorway.

"Who's there?" I demanded, releasing the safety catch on my automatic and sliding my feet out of bed to the floor. Then, without waiting for a reply, I blew out the lamp.

A low laugh came from the adjoining room. "It is a good thing your wall is full of cracks," said a deep voice, "or otherwise I might have stumbled into trouble. That is a mean-looking gun I saw before you blew out your lamp."

The voice was familiar, but I could not definitely place it. "Who are you?" I demanded.

"Light your lamp and I'll come in," replied my nocturnal visitor. "If you're nervous, you can keep your gun on the doorway, but please don't squeeze the trigger until you have had a chance to recognize me."

"Damn!" I exclaimed under my breath, as I started to relight the lamp.

"Chimney still hot?" inquired the deep voice from the outer room.

"Plenty hot," I replied, as I succeeded at last in igniting the wick and replacing the hot chimney. "Come in."

I remained seated on the edge of the bunk, but I kept the doorway covered with my gun. I heard again the clanking of metal upon metal, and then a man stepped into the light of my feeble lamp and halted in the doorway. He was a tall man apparently between twenty-five and thirty with grey eyes and black hair. He was naked but for leather trappings that supported weapons of unearthly design—a short sword, a long sword, a dagger, and a pistol; but my eyes did not need to inventory all these details before I recognized him. The instant that I saw him, I tossed my gun aside and sprang to my feet.

"John Carter!" I exclaimed.

"None other," he replied, with one of his rare smiles.

We grasped hands. "You haven't changed much," he said.

"Nor you at all," I replied.

He sighed and then smiled again. "God alone knows how old I am. I can recall no childhood, nor have I ever looked other than I look tonight; but come," he added, "you mustn't stand here in your bare feet. Hop back into bed again. These Arizona nights are none too warm."

He drew up a chair and sat down. "What were you reading?" he asked, as he picked up the magazine that had fallen to the floor and glanced at the illustration.

"It looks like a lurid tale."

"A pretty little bedtime story of assassination and kidnaping," I explained.

"Haven't you enough of that on earth without reading about it for entertainment?" he inquired. "We have on Mars."

"It is an expression of the normal morbid interest in the horrifying," I said.

"There is really no justification, but the fact remains that I enjoy such tales. However, I have lost my interest now. I want to hear

about you and Dejah Thoris and Carthoris, and what brought you here. It has been years since you have been back. I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again."

He shook his head, a little sadly I thought. "It is a long story, a story of love and loyalty, of hate and crime, a story of dripping swords, of strange places and strange people upon a stranger world. The living of it might have driven a weaker man to madness. To have one you love taken from you and not to know her fate!"

I did not have to ask whom he meant. It could be none other than the incomparable Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, and consort of John Carter, Warlord of Mars—the woman for whose deathless beauty a million swords had been kept red with blood on the dying planet for many a long year.

For a long time John Carter sat in silence staring at the floor. I knew that his thoughts were forty-three million miles away, and I was loath to interrupt them.

At last he spoke. "Human nature is alike everywhere," he mid. He flicked the edge of the magazine lying on my bunk. "We think that we want to forget the tragedies of life, but we do not. If they momentarily pass us by and leave us in peace, we must conjure them again, either in our thoughts or through some such medium as you have adopted. As you find a grim pleasure in reading about them, so I find a grim pleasure in thinking about them.

"But my memories of that great tragedy are not all sad. There was high adventure, there was noble fighting; and in the end there was —but perhaps you would like to hear about it."

I told him that I would, so he told me the story that I have set down here in his own words, as nearly as I can recall them.

Chapter 1

RAPAS THE ULSIO

Over nineteen hundred miles east of The Twin Cities of Helium, at about Lat. 30 degrees S., Lon. 172 degrees E., lies Zodanga. It has ever been a hotbed of sedition since the day that I led the fierce green hordes of Thark against it and, reducing it, added it to the Empire of Helium.

Within its frowning walls lives many a Zodangan who feels no loyalty for Helium; and here, too, have gathered numbers of the malcontents of the great empire ruled over by Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium. To Zodanga have migrated not a few of the personal and political enemies of the house of Tardos Mors and of his son-in-law, John Carter, Prince of Helium.

I visited the city as seldom as possible, as I had little love either for it or its people; but my duties called me there occasionally, principally because it was the headquarters of one of the most powerful guilds of assassins on Mars.

The land of my birth is cursed with its gangsters, its killers, and its kidnappers but these constitute but a slight menace as compared with the highly efficient organizations that flourish upon Mars. Here assassination is a profession; kidnaping, a fine art. Each has its guild, its laws, its customs, and its code of ethics; and so widespread are their ramifications that they seem inextricably interwoven into the entire social and political life of the planet.

For years I have been seeking to extirpate this noxious system,

but the job has seemed a thankless and hopeless one. Entrenched behind age-old ramparts of habit and tradition, they occupy a position in the public consciousness that has cast a certain glamour of romance and honor upon them.

The kidnappers are not in such good odor, but among the more notorious assassins are men who hold much the same position in the esteem of the masses as do your great heroes of the prize ring and the baseball diamond.

Furthermore, in the war that I was waging upon them, I was also handicapped by the fact that I must fight almost alone, as even those of the red men of Mars who felt as I did upon the subject also believed that to take sides with me against the assassins would prove but another means for committing suicide. Yet I know that even this would not have deterred them, had they felt that there was any hope of eventual success.

That I had for so long escaped the keen blade of the assassin seemed little less than a miracle to them, and I presume that only my extreme self-confidence in my ability to take care of myself prevented me from holding the same view.

Dejah Thoris and my son, Carthoris, often counseled me to abandon the fight; but all my life I have been loath to admit defeat, nor ever have I willingly abandoned the chance for a good fight.

Certain types of killings upon Mars are punishable by death, and most of the killings of the assassins fell in such categories. So far, this was the only weapon that I had been able to use against them, and then not always successfully, for it was usually difficult to prove their crime, since even eyewitnesses feared to testify against them.

But I had gradually evolved and organized another means of combating them. This consisted of a secret organization of super-assassins. In other words, I had elected to fight the devil with fire.

When an assassination was reported, my organization acted in the role of detective to ferret out the murderer. Then it acted as judge and jury and eventually as executioner. Its every move was made in secret, but over the heart of each of its victims an "X" was cut with the sharp point of a dagger.

We usually struck quickly, if we could strike at all; and soon the public and the assassins learned to connect that "X" over the heart

as the mark of the hand of justice falling upon the guilty; and I know that in a number of the larger cities of Helium we greatly reduced the death rate by assassination. Otherwise, however, we seemed as far from our goal as when we first started.

Our poorest results had been gained in Zodanga; and the assassins of that city openly boasted that they were too smart for me, for although they did not know positively, they guessed that the X's upon the breasts of their dead comrades were made by an organization headed by me.

I hope that I have not bored you with this exposition of these dry facts, but it seemed necessary to me that I do so as an introduction to the adventures that befell me, taking me to a strange world in an effort to thwart the malign forces that had brought tragedy into my life.

In my fight against the assassins of Barsoom, I had never been able to enlist many agents to serve in Zodanga; and those stationed there worked only in a half-hearted manner, so that our enemies had good reason to taunt us with our failure.

To say that such a condition annoyed me would be putting it mildly; and so I decided to go in person to Zodanga, not only for the purpose of making a thorough investigation, but to give the Zodangan assassins a lesson that would cause them to laugh out of the other side of their mouths.

I decided to go secretly and in disguise, for I knew that if I were to go there as John Carter, Warlord of Mars, I could learn nothing more than I already knew.

Disguise for me is a relatively simple matter. My white skin and black hair have made me a marked man upon Mars, where only the auburn-haired Lotharians and the totally bald Therns have skin as light colored as mine.

Although I had every confidence in the loyalty of my retainers, one never knows when a spy may insinuate himself into the most carefully selected organization.

For this reason, I kept my plans and preparations secret from even the most trusted members of my entourage.

In the hangars on the roof of my palace are fliers of various models, and I selected from among them a one-arm scout flier from which I surreptitiously removed the insignia of my house. Finding a

pretext to send the hangar guard away for a short time early one evening, I smuggled aboard the flier those articles that I needed to insure a satisfactory disguise. In addition to a red pigment for my own skin and paints for the body of the flier, I included a complete set of Zodangan harness, metal, and weapons.

That evening I spent alone with Dejah Thoris; and about twenty-five xats past the eighth zode, or at midnight earth time, I changed to a plain leather harness without insignia, and prepared to leave upon my adventure.

"I wish you were not going, my prince; I have a premonition that —well —that we are both going to regret it."

"The assassins must be taught a lesson," I replied, "or no one's life will be safe upon Barsoom. By their acts, they have issued a definite challenge; and that I cannot permit to go unnoticed."

"I suppose not," she replied. "You won your high position here with your sword; and by your sword I suppose you must maintain it, but I wish it were otherwise."

I took her in my arms and kissed her and told her not to worry—that I would not be gone long. Then I went to the hangar on the roof.

The hangar guard may have thought that it was an unusual time of night for me to be going abroad, but he could have had no suspicion as to my destination. I took off toward the West and presently was cutting the thin air of Mars beneath the myriad stars and the two gorgeous satellites of the red planet.

The moons of Mars have always intrigued me; and tonight, as I gazed upon them, I felt the lure of the mystery that surrounds them. Thuria, the nearer moon, known to earth men as Phobos, is the larger; and as it circles Barsoom at a distance of only 5800 miles, it presents a most gorgeous sight. Cluros, the farther moon, though only a little smaller in diameter than Thuria, appears to be much smaller because of the greater distance of its orbit from the planet, lying as it does, 14,500 miles away.

For ages, there was a Martian legend, which remained for me to explode, that the black race, the so-called First-born of Barsoom, lived upon Thuria, the nearer moon; but at the time I exposed the false gods of Mars, I demonstrated conclusively that the black race lived in the Valley Dor, near the south pole of the planet.

Thuria, seemingly hanging low above me, presented a gorgeous spectacle, which was rendered still more remarkable by the fact that she apparently moved through the heavens from west to east, due to the fact that her orbit is so near the planet she performs a revolution in less than one-third of that of the diurnal rotation of Mars. But as I watched her this night in dreamy fascination, little could I guess the part that she was so soon to play in the thrilling adventures and the great tragedy that lay just beyond my horizon.

When I was well beyond The Twin Cities of Helium, I cut off my running lights and circled to the South, gradually heading toward the East until I held a true course for Zodanga. Setting my destination compass, I was free to turn my attention to other matters, knowing that this clever invention would carry the ship safely to its destination.

My first task was to repaint the hull of the flier. I buckled straps onto my harness and onto rings in the gunwale of the craft; and then, lowering myself over the side, I proceeded to my work. It was slow work, for after painting as far as I could reach in all directions, I had to come on deck and change the position of the straps, so that I could cover another portion of the hull. But toward morning it was finally accomplished, though I cannot say that I looked with pride upon the result as anything of an artistic achievement. However, I had succeeded in covering the old paint and thus disguising the craft insofar as color was concerned. This accomplished, I threw my brush and the balance of the paint overboard, following them with the leather harness that I had worn from home.

As I had gotten almost as much paint upon myself as upon the hull of the boat, it took me some little time to erase the last vestige of this evidence that would acquaint a discerning observer with the fact that I had recently repainted my craft.

This done, I applied the red pigment evenly to every square inch of my naked body; so that after I had finished, I could have passed anywhere on Mars as a member of the dominant red race of Martians; and when I had donned the Zodangan harness, metal, and weapons, I felt that my disguise was complete.

It was now mid-forenoon; and, after eating, I lay down to snatch a few hours of sleep.

Entering a Martian city after dark is likely to be fraught with embarrassment for one whose mission may not be readily explained. It was, of course, possible that I might sneak in without lights; but the chances of detection by one of the numerous patrol boats was too great; and as I could not safely have explained my mission or revealed my identity, I should most certainly be sent to the pits and, doubtless, receive the punishment that is meted to spies—long imprisonment in the pits, followed by death in the arena.

Were I to enter with lights, I should most certainly be apprehended; and as I should not be able to answer questions satisfactorily, and as there would be no one to sponsor me, my predicament would be almost equally difficult; so as I approached the city before dawn of the second day, I cut out my motor and drifted idly well out of range of the searchlights of the patrol boats.

Even after daylight had come, I did not approach the city until the middle of the forenoon at a time when other ships were moving freely back and forth across the walls.

By day, and unless a city is actively at war, there are few restrictions placed upon the coming and going of small craft. Occasionally the patrol boats stop and question one of these; and as fines are heavy for operating without licenses, a semblance of regulation is maintained by the government.

In my case, it was not a question of a license to fly a ship but of my right to be in Zodanga at all; so my approach to the city was not without its spice of adventure.

At last the city wall lay almost directly beneath me; and I was congratulating myself upon my good fortune, as there was no patrol boat in sight; but I had congratulated myself too soon, for almost immediately there appeared from behind a lofty tower one of those swift little cruisers that are commonly used in all Martian cities for patrol service, and it was headed directly toward me.

I was moving slowly, so as not to attract unfavorable attention; but I can assure you that my mind was working rapidly. The one-man scout flier that I was using is very fast, and I might easily have turned and outdistanced the patrol boat; however, there were two very important objections to such a plan. One was that, unquestionably, the patrol boat would immediately open fire on me

with the chances excellent that they would bring me down. The other was, that should I escape, it would be practically impossible for me to enter the city again in this way, as my boat would be marked; and the entire patrol system would be on the lookout for it.

The cruiser was steadily approaching me, and I was preparing to bluff my way through with a cock-and-bull story of having been long absent from Zodanga and having lost my papers while I was away. The best that I could hope from this was that I should merely be fined for not having my papers, and as I was well supplied with money, such a solution of my difficulties would be a most welcome one.

This, however, was a very slim hope, as it was almost a foregone conclusion that they would insist upon knowing who my sponsor was at the time my lost papers were issued; and without a sponsor I would be in a bad way.

Just as they got within hailing distance, and I was sure that they were about to order me to stop, I heard a loud crash above me; and glancing up, I saw two small ships in collision. I could see the officer in command of the patrol boat plainly now; and as I glanced at him, I saw him looking up. He barked a short command; the nose of the patrol boat was elevated; and it circled rapidly upward, its attention diverted from me by a matter of vastly greater importance.

While it was thus engaged, I slipped quietly on into the city of Zodanga.

At the time, many years ago, that Zodanga was looted by the green hordes of Thark, it had been almost completely razed. It was the old city with which I had been most familiar, and I had visited the rebuilt Zodanga upon but one or two occasions since.

Cruising idly about, I finally found that for which I sought—an unpretentious public hangar in a shabby quarter of the city. There are quarters in every city with which I am familiar where one may go without being subjected to curious questioning, so long as one does not run afoul of the officers of the law. This hangar and this quarter of Zodanga looked such a place to me.

The hangar was located on the roof of a very old building that had evidently escaped the ravages of the Tharks. The landing space was small, and the hangars themselves dingy and unkempt.

As my craft settled to the roof, a fat man, well smeared with black grease, appeared from behind a flier upon the engine of which he was evidently working.

He looked at me questioningly, and I thought with none too friendly an expression. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"Is this a public hangar?"

"Yes."

"I want space for my craft."

"Have you got any money?" he demanded.

"I have a little. I will pay a month's rental in advance," I replied.

The frown melted from his face. "That hangar there is vacant," he said, pointing. "Run her in there."

Having housed my flier and locked the controls, I returned to the man and paid him.

"Is there a good public house near by?" I asked, "one that is cheap and not too dirty."

"There is one right in this building," he replied, "as good as any that you will find around here."

This suited me perfectly, as when one is on an adventure of this nature, one never knows how quickly a flier may be required or how soon it may be all that stands between one and death.

Leaving the surly hangar proprietor, I descended the ramp that opened onto the roof.

The elevators, ran only to the floor below the roof, and here I found one standing with its door open. The operator was a dissipated looking young fellow in shabby harness.

"Ground floor?" he asked.

"I am looking for lodgings," I replied. "I want to go to the office of the public house in this building."

He nodded, and the elevator started down. The building appeared even older and more dilapidated from the inside than the out, and the upper floors seemed practically untenanted.

"Here you are," he said presently, stopping the elevator and opening the door.

In Martian cities, public houses such as this are merely places to

sleep. There are seldom but few, if any, private rooms. Along the side walls of long rooms are low platforms upon which each guest places his sleeping silks and furs in a numbered space allotted to him.

Owing to the prevalence of assassination, these rooms are patrolled night and day by armed guards furnished by the proprietor; and it is largely because of this fact that private rooms are not in demand. In houses that cater to women, these guests are segregated; and there are more private rooms and no guards in their quarters, as the men of Barsoom seldom, if ever, kill a woman, or I may qualify that by saying that they do not employ assassins to kill them, ordinarily.

The public house to which chance had led me catered only to men. There were no women in it.

The proprietor, a burly man whom I later learned was formerly a famous panthan, or soldier of fortune, assigned me a sleeping place and collected his fee for a day's lodging; and after directing me to an eating-place in response to my inquiries, left me.

Scarcely any of the other guests were in the house at this hour of the day.

Their personal belongings, their sleeping silks and furs, were in the spaces allotted to them; and even though there had been no guards patrolling the room, they would have been safe, as thievery is practically unknown upon Mars.

I had brought with me some old and very ordinary sleeping silks and furs and these I deposited upon the platform. Sprawled in the adjoining space was a shifty-eyed individual with an evil face. I had noticed that he had been eyeing me surreptitiously ever since I had entered. At last he spoke to me.

"Kaor!" he said, using the familiar form of Martian greeting.

I nodded and replied in kind.

"We are to be neighbors," he ventured.

"So it would seem," I replied.

"You are evidently a stranger, at least in this part of the city," he continued.

"I overheard you asking the proprietor where you could find an eating-place. The one he directed you to is not as good as the one

that I go to. I am going there now; if you'd like to come along, I'll be glad to take you."

There was a furtiveness about the man that, in connection with his evil face, assured me that he was of the criminal class; and as it was among this class that I expected to work, his suggestion dovetailed nicely with my plans; so I quickly accepted.

"My name is Rapas," he said, "they call me Rapas the Ulsio," he added, not without a touch of pride.

Now I was sure that I had judged him correctly, for Ulsio means rat.

"My name is Vandor," I told him, giving him the alias I had selected for this adventure.

"By your metal, I see that you are a Zodangan," he said, as we walked from the room to the elevators.

"Yes," I replied, "but I have been absent from the city for years. In fact, I have not been here since it was burned by the Tharks. There have been so many changes that it is like coming to a strange city."

"From your looks, I'd take you to be a fighting man by profession," he suggested.

I nodded. "I am a panthan. I have served for many years in another country, but recently I killed a man and had to leave." I knew that if he were a criminal, as I had guessed, this admission of a murder upon my pan would make him freer with me.

His shifty eyes glanced quickly at me and then away; and I saw that he was impressed, one way or another, by my admission. On the way to the eating-place, which lay in another avenue a short distance from our public house, we carried on a desultory conversation.

When we had seated ourselves at a table, Rapas ordered drinks; and immediately after he had downed the first one his tongue loosened.

"Are you going to remain in Zodanga?" he asked.

"That depends upon whether or not I can find a living here," I replied. "My money won't last long; and, of course, leaving my last employer under the circumstances that I did, I have no papers; so I may have trouble in finding a place at all."

While we were eating our meal, Rapas continued to drink; and

the more he drank the more talkative he became.

"I have taken a liking to you, Vandor," he announced presently; "and if you are the right kind, as I think you are, I can find you employment." Finally he leaned close to me and whispered in my ear. "I am a gorthan," he said.

Here was an incredible piece of good fortune. I had hoped to contact the assassins, and the first man whose acquaintance I had made admitted that he was one.

I shrugged, deprecatively.

"Not much money in that," I said.

"There is plenty, if you are well connected," he assured me.

"But I am not connected well, or otherwise, here in Zodanga," I argued, "I don't belong to the Zodangan guild; and, as I told you, I had to come away without any papers."

He looked around him furtively to see if any were near who might overhear him.

"The guild is not necessary," he whispered; "we do not all belong to the guild."

"A good way to commit suicide," I suggested.

"Not for a man with a good head on him. Look at me; I am an assassin, and I don't belong to the guild. I make good money too, and I don't have to divide up with anyone." He took another drink. "There are not many with as good heads on them as Rapas the Ulsio."

He leaned closer to me. "I like you, Vandor," he said; "you are a good fellow."

His voice was getting thick from drink. "I have one very rich client; he has lots of work, and he pays well. I can get you an odd job with him now and again. Perhaps I can find steady employment for you. How would you like that?"

I shrugged. "A man must live," I said; "he can't be too particular about his job when he hasn't very much money."

"Well, you come along with me; I am going there tonight. While Fal Sivas talks to you, I will tell him that you are just the man that he needs."

"But how about you?" I inquired. "It is your job; certainly no man

needs two assassins."

"Never mind about me," said Rapas; "I have other ideas in my head." He stopped suddenly and gave me a quick, suspicious look. It was almost as though what he had said had sobered him. He shook his head, evidently in an effort to clear it.

"What did I say?" he demanded. "I must be getting drunk."

"You said that you had other plans. I suppose you mean that you have a better job in view."

"Is that all I said?" he demanded.

"You said that you would take me to a man called Fal Sivas who would give me employment."

Rapas seemed relieved. "Yes, I will take you to see him tonight."

Chapter 2

FAL SIVAS

For the balance of the day Rapas slept, while I occupied my time puttering around my flier in the public hangar on the roof of the hostelry. This was a far more secluded spot than the public sleeping room or the streets of the city, where some accident might pierce my disguise and reveal my identity.

As I worked over my motor, I recalled Rapas's sudden fear that he had revealed something to me in his drunken conversation; and I wondered idly what it might be. It had come following his statement that he had other plans. What plans?

Whatever they were, they were evidently nefarious, or he would not have been so concerned when he feared that he had revealed them.

My short acquaintance with Rapas had convinced me that my first appraisal of his character was correct and that his sobriquet of Rapas the Rat was well deserved.

I chafed under the enforced inactivity of the long day; but at last evening came, and Rapas the Ulsio and I left our quarters and made our way once more to the eating-place.

Rapas was sober now, nor did he take but a single drink with his meal. "You've got to have a clear head when you talk to old Fal Sivas," he said. "By my first ancestor, no shrewder brain was ever hatched of a woman's egg."

After we had eaten, we went out into the night; and Rapas led me

through broad avenues and down narrow alleyways until we came to a large building that stood near the eastern wall of Zodanga.

It was a dark and gloomy pile, and the avenue that ran before it was unlighted.

It stood in a district given over to warehouses, and at this time of night its surroundings were deserted.

Rapas approached a small doorway hidden in an angle of a buttress. I saw him groping with his hands at one side of the door, and presently he stepped back and waited.

"Not everyone can gain admission to old Fal Sivas's Place," he remarked, with a tinge of boastfulness. "You have to know the right signal, and that means that you have to be pretty well in the confidence of the old man."

We waited in silence then for perhaps two or three minutes. No sound came from beyond the door; but presently a very small, round port in its surface opened; and in the dim light of the farther moon I saw an eye appraising us. Then a voice spoke.

"Ah, the noble Rapas!" The words were whispered; and following them, the door swung in.

The passage beyond was narrow, and the man who had opened the door flattened himself against the wall that we might pass. Then he closed the door behind us and followed us along a dark corridor, until we finally emerged into a small, dimly lighted room.

Here our guide halted. "The master did not say that you were bringing another with you," he said to Rapas.

"He did not know it," replied Rapas. "In fact, I did not know it myself until today; but it is all right. Your master will be glad to receive him when I have explained why I brought him."

"That is a matter that Fal Sivas will have to decide for himself," replied the slave. "Perhaps you had better go first and speak to him, leaving the stranger here with me."

"Very well, then," agreed my companion. "Remain here until I return, Vandor."

The slave unlocked the door in the far side of the anteroom; and after Rapas had passed through, he followed him and closed it.

It occurred to me that his action was a little strange, as I had just heard him say that he would remain with me, but I would have

thought nothing more of the matter had I not presently become impressed with the very definite sensation that I was being watched.

I cannot explain this feeling that I occasionally have. Earth men who should know say that this form of telepathy is scientifically impossible, yet upon many occasions I have definitely sensed this secret surveillance, later to discover that I really was being watched.

As my eyes wandered casually about the room, they came to rest again upon the door beyond which Rapas and the slave had disappeared. They were held momentarily by a small round hole in the paneling and the glint of something that might have been an eye shining in the darkness. I knew that it was an eye.

Just why I should be watched, I did not know; but if my observer hoped to discover anything suspicious about me, he was disappointed; for as soon as I realized that an eye was upon me, I walked to a bench at one side of the room and sat down, instantly determined not to reveal the slightest curiosity concerning my surroundings.

Such surveillance probably meant little in itself, but taken in connection with the gloomy and forbidding appearance of the building and the great stealth and secrecy with which we had been admitted, it crystallized a most unpleasant impression of the place and its master that had already started to form in my mind.

From beyond the walls of the room there came no sound, nor did any of the night noises of the city penetrate to the little anteroom. Thus I sat in utter silence for about ten minutes; then the door opened, and the same slave beckoned to me.

"Follow me," he said. "The master will see you. I am to take you to him."

I followed him along a gloomy corridor and up a winding ramp to the next higher level of the building. A moment later he ushered me into a softly lighted room furnished with Sybaritic luxury, where I saw Rapas standing before a couch on which a man reclined, or I should say, crouched. Somehow he reminded me of a great cat watching its prey, always ready to spring.

"This is Vandor, Fal Sivas," said Rapas, by way of introduction.

I inclined my head in acknowledgment and stood before the man,

waiting.

"Rapas has told me about you," said Fal Sivas. "Where are you from?"

"Originally I was from Zodanga," I replied, "but that was years ago before the sacking of the city."

"And where have you been since?" he asked. "Whom have you served?"

"That," I replied, "is a matter of no consequence to anyone but myself. It is sufficient that I have not been in Zodanga, and that I cannot return to the country that I have just fled."

"You have no friends or acquaintances in Zodanga, then?" he asked.

"Of course, some of my acquaintances may still be living; that I do not know," I replied, "but my people and most of my friends were killed at the time that the green hordes overran the city."

"And you have had no intercourse with Zodanga since you left?" he asked.

"None whatsoever."

"Perhaps you are just the man I need. Rapas is sure of it, but I am never sure. No man can be trusted."

"Ah, but master," interrupted Rapas, "have I not always served you well and faithfully?"

I thought I saw a slight sneer curl the lip of Fal Sivas.

"You are a paragon, Rapas," he said, "the soul of honor."

Rapas swelled with importance. He was too egotistical to note the flavor of sarcasm in Fal Sivas's voice.

"And I may consider myself employed?" I asked.

"You understand that you may be called upon to use a dagger more often than a sword," he asked, "and that poisons are sometimes preferred to pistols?"

"I understand."

He looked at me intently.

"There may come a time," he continued, "when you may have to draw your long sword or your short sword in my defense. Are you a capable swordsman?"

"I am a panthan," I replied; "and as panthans live by the sword, the very fact that I am here answers your question."

"Not entirely. I must have a master swordsman. Rapas, here, is handy with the short sword. Let us see what you can do against him."

"To the death?" I asked.

Rapas guffawed loudly. "I did not bring you here to kill you," he said.

"No, not to the death, of course," said Fal Sivas. "Just a short passage. Let us see which one can scratch the other first."

I did not like the idea. I do not ordinarily draw my sword unless I intend to kill, but I realized that I was playing a part and that before I got through I might have to do many things of which I did not approve; so I nodded my assent and waited for Rapas to draw.

His short sword flashed from its scabbard. "I shall not hurt you badly, Vandor," he said; "for I am very fond of you."

I thanked him and drew my own weapon.

Rapas stepped forward to engage me, a confident smile upon his lips. The next instant his weapon was flying across the room. I had disarmed him, and he was at my mercy. He backed away, a sickly grin upon his face. Fal Sivas laughed.

"It was an accident," said Rapas. "I was not ready."

"I am sorry," I told him; "go and recover your weapon."

He got it and came back, and this time he lunged at me viciously. There would have been no mere scratch that time if his thrust had succeeded. He would have spitted me straight through the heart. I parried and stepped in, and again his sword hurtled through the air and clanked against the opposite wall.

Fal Sivas laughed uproariously. Rapas was furious. "That is enough," said the former. "I am satisfied. Sheath your swords."

I knew that I had made an enemy of Rapas; but that did not concern me greatly, since being forewarned I could always be watchful of him. Anyway, I had never trusted him.

"You are prepared to enter my service at once?" asked Fal Sivas.

"I am in your service now," I replied.

He smiled. "I think you are going to make me a good man. Rapas

wants to go away for a while to attend to business of his own. While he is away, you will remain here as my bodyguard. When he returns, I may still find use for you in one way or another. The fact that you are unknown in Zodanga may make you very valuable to me." He turned to Rapas. "You may go now, Rapas," he said, "and while you are away, you might take some lessons in swordsmanship."

When Pal Sivas said that, he grinned; but Rapas did not. He looked very sour, and he did not say good-bye to me as he left the room.

"I am afraid that you offended his dignity," said Fal Sivas after the door had closed behind the assassin.

"I shall lose no sleep over it," I replied, "and anyway it was not my fault. It was his."

"What do you mean?" demanded Fal Sivas.

"Rapas is not a good swordsman."

"He is considered an excellent one," Fal Sivas assured me.

"I imagine that as a killer he is more adept with the dagger and poison."

"And how about you?" he asked.

"Naturally, as a fighting man, I prefer the sword," I replied.

Fal Sivas shrugged. "That is a matter of small concern to me," he said. "If you prefer to kill my enemies with a sword, use a sword. All I ask is that you kill them."

"You have many enemies?" I asked.

"There are many who would like to see me put out of the way," he replied. "I am an inventor, and there are those who would steal my inventions. Many of these I have had to destroy. Their people suspect me and seek revenge; but there is one who, above all others, seeks to destroy me. He also is an inventor, and he has employed an agent of the assassins' guild to make away with me.

"This guild is headed by Ur Jan, and he personally has threatened my life because I have employed another than a member of his guild to do my killing."

We talked for a short time, and then Fal Sivas summoned a slave to show me to my quarters. "They are below mine," he said; "if I

call, you are to come to me immediately. Good night."

The slave led me to another room on the same level. In fact, to a little suite of three rooms. They were plainly but comfortably furnished.

"Is there anything that you require, master?" the slave inquired, as he turned to leave me.

"Nothing," I replied.

"Tomorrow a slave will be assigned to serve you." With that he left me, and I listened to see if he locked the door from the outside; but he did not, though I would not have been surprised had he done so, so sinister and secretive seemed everything connected with this gloomy pile.

I occupied myself for a few moments inspecting my quarters. They consisted of a living room, two small bedrooms, and a bath. A single door opened from the living room onto the corridor. There were no windows in any of the rooms. There were small ventilators in the floors and in the ceilings, and draughts of air entering the former indicated that the apartment was ventilated mechanically.

The rooms were lighted by radium bulbs similar to those generally used throughout Barsoom.

In the living room was a table, a bench, and several chairs, and a shelf upon which were a number of books. Glancing at some of these, I discovered that they were all scientific works. There were books on medicine, on surgery, chemistry, mechanics, and electricity.

From time to time, I heard what appeared to be stealthy noises in the corridor; but I did not investigate, as I wanted to establish myself in the confidence of Fal Sivas and his people before I ventured to take it upon myself to learn any more than they desired me to know. I did not even know that I wanted to know anything more about the household of Fal Sivas; for, after all, my business in Zodanga had nothing to do with him. I had come to undermine and, if possible, overthrow the strength of Ur Jan and his guild of assassins; and all I needed was a base from which to work. I was, in fact, a little disappointed to find that Fate had thrown me in with those opposed to Ur Jan. I would have preferred and, in fact, had hoped to be able to join Ur Jan's organization, as I felt that I could accomplish much more from the inside than from the out.

If I could join the guild, I could soon learn the identity of its principal members; and that, above all other things, was what I wished to do, that I might either bring them to justice or put the cross upon their hearts with the point of my own sword.

Occupied with these thoughts, I was about to remove my harness and turn into my sleeping silks and furs when I heard sounds of what might have been a scuffle on the level above and then a thud, as of a body falling.

The former preternatural silence of the great house accentuated the significance of the sounds that I was hearing, imparting to them a mystery that I realized might be wholly out of proportion to their true importance. I smiled as I realized the effect that my surroundings seemed to be having upon my ordinarily steady nerves; and had resumed my preparations for the night when a shrill scream rang through the building.

I paused again and listened, and now I distinctly heard the sound of feet running rapidly. They seemed to be approaching, and I guessed that they were coming down the ramp from the level above to the corridor that ran before my quarters.

Perhaps what went on in the house of Fal Sivas was none of my affair, but I have never yet heard a woman scream without investigating; so now I stepped to the door of my living room and threw it open, and as I did so I saw a girl running rapidly toward me. Her hair was disheveled; and from her wide, frightened eyes she cast frequent glances backward over her shoulder.

She was almost upon me before she discovered me; and when she did she paused for a moment with a gasp of astonishment or fear, I could not tell which; then she darted past me through the open door into my living room.

"Close the door," she whispered, her voice tense with suppressed emotion. "Don't let him get me! Don't let him find me!"

No one seemed to be pursuing her, but I closed the door as she had requested and turned toward her for an explanation.

"What is the matter?" I demanded. "From whom were you running?"

"From him." She shuddered. "Oh, he is horrible. Hide me; don't let him get me, please!"

"Whom do you mean? Who is horrible?"

She stood there trembling and wide-eyed, staring past me at the door, like one whom terror had demented.

"Him," she whispered. "Who else could it be?"

"You mean—?"

She came close and started to speak; then she hesitated. "But why should I trust you? You are one of his creatures. You are all alike in this terrible place."

She was standing very close to me now, trembling like a leaf. "I cannot stand it!" she cried. "I will not let him!" And then, so quickly that I could not prevent her, she snatched the dagger from my harness and turned it upon herself.

But there I was too quick for her, seizing her wrist before she could carry out her designs.

She was a delicate-looking creature, but her appearance belied her strength.

However, I had little difficulty in disarming her; and then I backed her toward the bench and forced her down upon it.

"Calm yourself," I said; "you have nothing to fear from me—nothing to fear from anybody while I am with you. Tell me what has happened. Tell me whom you fear."

She sat there staring into my eyes for a long moment, and presently she commenced to regain control of herself. "Yes," she said presently, "perhaps I can trust you. You make me feel that way—your voice, your looks."

I laid my hand upon her shoulder as one might who would quiet a frightened child. "Do not be afraid," I said; "tell me something of yourself. What is your name?"

"Zanda," she replied.

"You live here?"

"I am a slave, a prisoner,"

"What made you scream?" I asked.

"I did not scream," she replied; "that was another. He tried to get me, but I eluded him, and so he took another. My turn will come. He will get me. He gets us all."

"Who? Who will get you?"

She shuddered as she spoke the name. "Fal Sivas," she said, and there was horror in her tone.

I sat down on the bench beside her and laid my hand on hers. "Quiet yourself," I said; "tell me what all this means. I am a stranger here. I just entered the service of Fal Sivas tonight."

"You know nothing, then, about Fal Sivas?" she demanded.

"Only that he is a wealthy inventor and fears for his life."

"Yes, he is rich; and he is an inventor, but not so great an inventor as he is a murderer and a thief. He steals ideas from other inventors and then has them murdered in order to safeguard what he has stolen. Those who learn too much of his inventions die. They never leave this house. He always has an assassin ready to do his bidding; sometimes here, sometimes out in the city; and he is always afraid of his life.

"Rapas the Ulsio is his assassin now; but they are both afraid of Ur Jan, chief of the guild of assassins; for Ur Jan has learned that Rapas is killing for Fal Sivas for a price far lower than that charged by the guild."

"But what are these wonderful inventions that Fal Sivas works upon?" I asked.

"I do not know all of the things that he does, but there is the ship. That would be wonderful, were it not born of blood and treachery."

"What sort of a ship?" I asked.

"A ship that will travel safely through interplanetary space. He says that in a short time we shall be able to travel back and forth between the planets as easily as we travel now from one city to another."

"Interesting," I said, "and not so very horrible, that I can see."

"But he does other things—horrible things. One of them is a mechanical brain."

"A mechanical brain?"

"Yes, but of course I cannot explain it. I have so little learning. I have heard him speak of it often, but I do not understand.

"He says that all life, all matter, are the result of mechanical action, not primarily, chemical action. He holds that all chemical action is mechanical.

"Oh, I am probably not explaining it right. It is all so confusing to me, because I do not understand it; but anyway he is working on a mechanical brain, a brain that win think clearly and logically, absolutely uninfluenced by any of the extraneous media that affect human judgments."

"It seems rather a weird idea," I said, "but I can see nothing so horrible about it."

"It is not the idea that is horrible," she said; "it is the method that he employs to perfect his invention. In his effort to duplicate the human brain, he must examine it. For this reason he needs many slaves. A few he buys, but most of them are kidnaped for him."

She commenced to tremble, and her voice came in little broken gasps. "I do not know; I have not really seen it; but they say that he straps his victims so that they cannot move and then removes the skull until he has exposed the brain; and so, by means of rays that penetrate the tissue, he watches the brain function."

"But his victims cannot suffer long," I said; "they would lose consciousness and die quickly."

She shook her head. "No, he has perfected drugs that he injects into their veins so that they remain alive and are conscious for a long time. For long hours he applies various stimuli and watches the reaction of the brain. Imagine if you can, the suffering of his poor victims.

"Many slaves are brought here, but they do not remain long. There are only two doors leading from the building, and there are no windows in the outer walls.

"The slaves that disappear do not leave through either of the two doorways. I see them today; tomorrow they are gone, gone through the little doorway that leads into the room of horror next to Fal Sivas's sleeping quarters.

"Tonight Fal Sivas sent for two of us, another girl and myself. He purposed using only one of us. He always examines a couple and then selects the one that he thinks is the best specimen, but his selection is not determined wholly by scientific requirements. He always selects the more attractive of the girls that are summoned.

"He examined us, and then finally he selected me. I was terrified. I tried to fight him off. He chased me about the room, and then he slipped and fell; and before he could regain his feet, I opened the

door and escaped. Then I heard the other girl scream, and I knew that he had seized her, but I have won only a reprieve. He will get me; there is no escape. Neither you nor I will ever leave this place alive."

"What makes you think that?" I inquired.

"No one ever does."

"How about Rapas?" I asked. "He comes and goes apparently as he wishes."

"Yes, Rapas comes and goes. He is Fal Sivas's assassin. He also aids in the kidnaping of new victims. Under the circumstances he would have to be free to leave the building. Then there are a few others, old and trusted retainers, really partners in crime, whose lives Fal Sivas holds in the palm of his hand; but you may rest assured that none of these know too much about his inventions. The moment that one is taken into Fal Sivas's confidence, his days are numbered.

"The man seems to have a mania for talking about his inventions. He must explain them to someone. I think that is because of his great egotism. He loves to boast. That is the reason he tells us who are doomed so much about his work. You may rest assured that Rapas knows nothing of importance. In fact, I have heard Fal Sivas say that one thing that endeared Rapas to him is the assassin's utter stupidity. Fal Sivas says that if he explained every detail of an invention to him, Rapas wouldn't have brains enough to understand it."

By this time the girl had regained control of herself; and as she ceased speaking, she started toward the doorway. "Thank you so much," she said, "for letting me come in here. I shall probably never see you again, but I should like to know who it is who has befriended me."

"My name is Vandor," I replied, "but what makes you think you will never see me again, and where are you going now?"

"I am going back to my quarters to wait for the next summons. It may come tomorrow."

"You are going to stay right here," I replied; "we may find a way of getting you out of this, yet."

She looked at me in surprise and was about to reply when

suddenly she cocked her head on one side and listened. "Someone is coming," she said; "they are searching for me."

I took her by the hand and drew her toward the doorway to my sleeping apartment.

"Come in here," I said. "Let's see if we can't hide you."

"No, no," she demurred; "they would kill us both then, if they found me. You have been kind to me. I do not want them to kill you."

"Don't worry about me," I replied; "I can take care of myself. Do as I tell you."

I took her into my room and made her lie down on the little platform that serves in Barsoom. as a bed. Then I threw the sleeping silks and furs over her in a jumbled heap. Only by close examination could anyone have discovered that her little form lay hidden beneath them.

Stepping into the living room, I took a book at random from the shelf; and seating myself in a chair, opened it. I had scarcely done so, when I heard a scratching on the outside of the door leading to the corridor.

"Come in," I called.

The door opened, and Fal Sivas stepped into the room.

Chapter 3

TRAPPED

Lowering my book, I looked up as Fal Sivas entered. He glanced quickly and suspiciously about the apartment. I had purposely left the door to my sleeping room open, so as not to arouse suspicion should anyone come in to investigate.

The doors to the other sleeping room and bath were also open. Fal Sivas glanced at the book in my hand. "Rather heavy reading for a panthan," he remarked.

I smiled. "I recently read his Theoretical Mechanics. This is an earlier work, I believe, and not quite so authoritative. I was merely glancing through it."

Fal Sivas studied me intently for a moment. "Are you not a little too well educated for your calling?" he asked.

"One may never know too much," I replied.

"One may know too much here," he said, and I recalled what the girl had told me.

His tone changed. "I stopped in to see if everything was all right with you, if you were comfortable."

"Very," I replied.

"You have not been disturbed? No one has been here?"

"The house seems very quiet," I replied. "I heard someone laughing a short time ago, but that was all. It did not disturb me."

"Has anyone come to your quarters?" he asked.

"Why, was someone supposed to come?"

"No one, of course," he said shortly, and then he commenced to question me in an evident effort to ascertain the extent of my mechanical and chemical knowledge.

"I really know little of either subject," I told him. "I am a fighting man by profession, not a scientist. Of course, familiarity with fliers connotes some mechanical knowledge, but after all I am only a tyro."

He was studying me quizzically. "I wish that I knew you better," he said at last; "I wish that I knew that I could trust you. You are an intelligent man. In the matter of brains, I am entirely alone here. I need an assistant. I need such a man as you." He shook his head, rather disgustedly. "But what is the use? I can trust no one."

"You employed me as your bodyguard. For that work I am fitted. Let it go at that."

"You are right," he agreed. "Time will tell what else you are fitted for."

"And if I am to protect you," I continued, "I must know more about your enemies. I must know who they are, and I must learn their plans."

"There are many who would like to see me destroyed, or destroy me themselves; but there is one who, above all others, would profit by my death. He is Gar Nal, the inventor." He looked up at me questioningly.

"I have never heard of him," I said. "You must remember that I have been absent from Zodanga for many years."

He nodded. "I am perfecting a ship that will traverse space. So is Gar Nal. He would like not only to have me destroyed, but also to steal the secrets of my invention that would permit him to perfect his; but Ur Jan is the one I most fear, because Gar Nal has employed him to destroy me."

"I am unknown in Zodanga. I will hunt out this Ur Jan and see what I can learn."

There was one thing that I wanted to learn right then, and that was whether or not Fal Sivas would permit me to leave his house on any pretext.

"You could learn nothing," he said; "their meetings are secret.

Even if you could gain admission, which is doubtful, you would be killed before you could get out again."

"Perhaps not," I said; "it is worth trying, anyway. Do you know where they hold their meetings?"

"Yes, but if you want to try that, I will have Rapas guide you to the building."

"If I am to go, I do not want Rapas to know anything about it," I said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because I do not trust him," I replied. "I would not trust anyone with knowledge of my plans."

"You are quite right. When you are ready to go, I can give you directions so that you can find their meeting place."

"I will go tomorrow," I said, "after dark."

He nodded his approval. He was standing where he could look directly into the bedroom where the girt was hidden. "Have you plenty of sleeping silks and furs?" he asked.

"Plenty," I replied, "but I will bring my own tomorrow."

"That will not be necessary. I will furnish you all that you require." He still stood staring into that other room. I wondered if he suspected the truth, or if the girl had moved or her breathing were noticeable under the pile of materials beneath which she was hidden.

I did not dare to turn and look for myself for fear of arousing his suspicions further. I just sat there waiting, my hands close to the hilt of my short sword.

Perhaps the girl was near discovery; but, if so, Fal Sivas was also near death that moment.

At last he turned toward the outer doorway. "I will give you directions tomorrow for reaching the headquarters of the gorthans, and also tomorrow I will send you a slave. Do you wish a man or a woman?"

I preferred a man, but I thought that I detected here a possible opportunity for protecting the girl. "A woman," I said.

He smiled. "And a pretty one, eh?"

"I should like to select her myself, if I may."

"As you wish," he replied. "I shall let you look them over tomorrow. May you sleep well."

He left the room and closed the door behind him; but I knew that he stood outside for a long time, listening.

I picked I up the book once more and commenced to read it; but not a word registered on my consciousness, for all my faculties were centered on listening.

After what seemed a long time, I heard him move away; and shortly after I distinctly heard a door close on the level above me. Not until then did I move, but now I arose and went to the door. It was equipped with a heavy bar on the inside, and this I slid silently into its keeper.

Crossing the room, I entered the chamber where the girl lay and threw back the covers that concealed her. She had not moved. As she looked up at me, I placed a finger across my lips.

"You heard?" I asked in a low whisper.

She nodded.

"Tomorrow I will select you as my slave. Perhaps later I shall find a way to liberate you."

"You are kind," she said.

I reached down and took her by the hand. "Come," I said, "into the other room. You can sleep there safely tonight, and in the morning we will plan how we may carry out the rest of our scheme."

"I think that will not be difficult," she said. "Early in the morning everyone but Fal Sivas goes to a large dining room on this level. Many of them will pass along this corridor. I can slip out, unseen, and join them. At breakfast you will have an opportunity of seeing all the slaves. Then you may select me if you still wish to do so."

There were sleeping silks and furs in the room that I had assigned to her, and I knew that she would be comfortable; so I left her, and returning to my own room completed my preparations for the night that had been so strangely interrupted.

Early the next morning Zanda awoke me. "It will soon be time for them to go to breakfast," she said. "You must go before I do, leaving the door open. Then when there is no one in the corridor, I will slip out."

As I left my quarters, I saw two or three people moving along the corridor in the direction that Zanda had told me the dining room lay; and so I followed them, finally entering a large room in which there was a table that would seat about twenty. It was already over half filled. Most of the slaves were women—young women, and many of them were beautiful.

With the exception of two men, one sitting at either end of the table, all the occupants of the room were without weapons.

The man sitting at the head of the table was the same who had admitted Rapas and me the evening before. I learned later that his name was Hamas, and that he was the major-domo of the establishment.

The other armed man was Phystal. He was in charge of the slaves in the establishment. He also, as I was to learn later, attended to the procuring of many of them, usually by bribery or abduction.

As I entered the room, Hamas discovered me and motioned me to come to him. "You will sit here, next to me, Vandor," he said.

I could not but note the difference in his manner from the night before, when he had seemed more or less an obsequious slave. I gathered that he played two roles for purposes known best to himself or his master. In his present role, he was obviously a person of importance.

"You slept well?" he asked.

"Quite," I replied; "the house seems very quiet and peaceful at night."

He grunted. "If you should hear any unusual sounds at night," he said, "you will not investigate, unless the master or I call you." And then, as though he felt that that needed some explanation, he added, "Fal Sivas sometimes works upon his experiments late at night. You must not disturb him no matter what you may hear."

Some more slaves were entering the room now, and just behind them came Zanda. I glanced at Hamas and saw his eyes narrow as they alighted upon her.

"Here she is now, Phystal," he said.

The man at the far end of the table turned in his seat and looked at the girl approaching from behind him. He was scowling angrily.

"Where were you last night, Zanda?" he demanded, as the girl

approached the table.

"I was frightened, and I hid," she replied.

"Where did you hide?" demanded Phystal.

"Ask Hamas," she replied.

Phystal glanced at Hamas. "How should I know where you were?" demanded the latter.

Zanda elevated her arched brows. "Oh, I am sorry," she exclaimed; "I did not know that you cared who knew."

Hamas scowled angrily. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded; "what are you driving at?"

"Oh," she said, "I wouldn't have said anything about it at all but I thought, of course, that Fal Sivas knew."

Phystal was eyeing Hamas suspiciously. All the slaves were looking at him, and you could almost read their thoughts in the expressions on their faces.

Hamas was furious, Phystal suspicious; and all the time the girl stood there with the most innocent and angelic expression on her face.

"What do you mean by saying such a thing?" shouted Hamas.

"What did I say?" she asked, innocently.

"You said—you said-"

"I just said, 'ask Hamas.' Is there anything wrong in that?"

"But what do I know about it?" demanded the majordomo.

Zanda shrugged her slim shoulders. "I am afraid to say anything more. I do not want to get you in trouble."

"Perhaps the less said about it, the better," said Phystal.

Hamas started to speak, but evidently thought better of it. He glowered at Zanda for a moment and then fell to eating his breakfast.

Just before the meal was over, I told Hamas that Fal Sivas had instructed me to select a slave.

"Yes, he told me," replied the major-domo. "See Phystal about it; he is in charge of the slaves."

"But does he know that Fal Sivas gave me permission to select anyone that I chose?"

"I will tell him."

A moment later he finished his breakfast; and as he was leaving the dining room, he paused and spoke to Phystal.

Seeing that Phystal also was about ready to leave the table, I went to him and told him that I would like to select a slave.

"Which one do you want?" he asked.

I glanced around the table, apparently examining each of the slaves carefully until at last my eyes rested upon Zanda.

"I will take this one," I said.

Phystal's brows contracted, and he hesitated.

"Fal Sivas said that I might select whomever I wished," I reminded him.

"But why do you want this one?" he demanded.

"She seems intelligent, and she is good-looking," I replied. "She will do as well as another until I am better acquainted here." And so it was that Zanda was appointed to serve me. Her duties would consist of keeping my apartments clean, running errands for me, cleaning my harness, shining my metal, sharpening my swords and daggers, and otherwise making herself useful.

I would much rather have had a man slave, but events had so ordered themselves that I had been forced into the role of the girl's protector, and this seemed the only plan by which I could accomplish anything along that line; but whether or not Fal Sivas would permit me to keep her, I did not know. That was a contingency which remained for future solution when, and if, it eventuated.

I took Zanda back to my quarters; and while she was busying herself with her duties there, I received a call summoning me to Fal Sivas.

A slave led me to the same room in which Fal Sivas had received Rapas and me the night before, and as I entered the old inventor greeted me with a nod. I expected him to immediately question me concerning Zanda, for both Hamas and Phystal were with him; and I had no doubt but that they had reported all that had occurred at the breakfast table.

However, I was agreeably disappointed, for he did not mention the incident at all, but merely gave me instructions as to my duties.

I was to remain on duty in the corridor outside his door and accompany him when he left the room. I was to permit no one to enter the room, other than Hamas or Phystal, without obtaining permission from Fal Sivas. When he left the room, I was to accompany him. Under no circumstances was I ever to go to the level above, except with his permission or by his express command. He was very insistent in impressing this point upon my mind; and though I am not overly curious, I must admit that now that I had been forbidden to go to any of the levels above, I wanted to do so.

"When you have been in my service longer and I know you better," explained Fal Sivas, "I hope to be able to trust you; but for the present you are on probation."

That was the longest day I have ever spent, just standing around outside that door, doing nothing; but at last it drew to a close, and when I had the opportunity, I reminded Fal Sivas that he had promised to direct me to Ur Jan's headquarters, so that I might try to gain entrance to them that night.

He gave me very accurate directions to a building in another quarter of the city.

"You are free to start whenever you wish," he said, in conclusion; "I have given Hamas instructions that you may come and go as you please. He will furnish you with a pass signal whereby you may gain admission to the house. I wish you luck," he said, "but I think that the best you will get will be a sword through your heart. You are pitting yourself against the fiercest and most unscrupulous gang of men in Zodanga."

"It is a chance that I shall have to take," I said. "Good night."

I went to my quarters and told Zanda to lock herself in after I had left and to open the door only in answer to a certain signal which I imparted to her. She was only too glad to obey my injunction.

When I was ready to leave the building, Hamas conducted me to the outer doorway.

Here he showed me a hidden button set in the masonry and explained to me how I might use it to announce my return.

I had gone but a short distance from the house of Fal Sivas when I met Rapas the Ulsio. He seemed to have forgotten his anger toward me, or else he was dissimulating, for he greeted me cordially.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Off for the evening," I replied.

"Where are you going, and what are you going to do?"

"I am going to the public house to get my things together and store them, and then I shall look around for a little entertainment."

"Suppose we get together later in the evening," he suggested.

"All right," I replied; "when and where?"

"I will be through with my business about half after the eighth zode. Suppose we meet at the eating-place I took you to yesterday."

"All right," I said, "but do not wait long for me. I may get tired of looking for pleasure and return to my quarters long before that."

After leaving Rapas, I went to the public house where I had left my things; and gathering them up I took them to the hangar on the roof and stored them in my flier. This done, I returned to the street and made my way toward the address that Fal Sivas had given me.

The way led me through a brilliantly lighted shopping district and into a gloomy section of the old town. It was a residential district, but of the meaner sort.

Some of the houses still rested upon the ground, but most of them were elevated on their steel shafts twenty or thirty feet above the pavement.

I heard laughter and song and occasional brawling—the sounds of the night life of a great Martian city, and then I passed on into another and seemingly deserted quarter.

I was approaching the headquarters of the assassins. I kept in the shadows of the buildings, and I avoided the few people that were upon the avenue by slipping into doorways and alleys. I did not wish anyone to see me here who might be able afterward to recognize or identify me. I was playing a game with Death, and I must give him no advantage.

When finally I reached the building for which I was seeking, I found a doorway on the opposite side of the avenue from which I could observe my goal without being seen.

The farther moon cast a faint light upon the face of the building but revealed to me nothing of importance.

At first, I could discern no lights in the building; but after closer

observation I saw a dim reflection behind the windows of the upper floor. There, doubtless, was the meeting-place of the assassins; but how was I to reach it?

That the doors to the building would be securely locked and every approach to the meeting-place well guarded, seemed a foregone conclusion.

There were balconies before the windows at several levels, and I noticed particularly that there were three of these in front of windows on the upper story. These balconies offered me a means of ingress to the upper floor if I could but reach them.

The great strength and agility which the lesser gravitation of Mars imparts to my earthly muscles might have sufficed to permit me to climb the exterior of the building, except for the fact that this particular building seemed to offer no foothold up to the fifth story, above which its carved ornamentation commenced.

Mentally debating every possibility, by a process of elimination, I was forced to the conclusion that my best approach would be by way of the roof.

However, I determined to investigate the possibilities of the main entrance on the ground floor; and was about to cross the avenue for that purpose when I saw two men approaching. Stepping back into the shadows of my hiding-place, I waited for them to pass; but instead of doing so they stopped before the entrance to the building I was watching. They were there but a moment when I saw the door open and the men admitted. This incident convinced me that someone was on guard at the main entrance to the building, and that it would be futile for me to attempt to enter there.

There now remained to me only the roof as a means of entrance to the building, and I quickly decided upon a plan to accomplish my design.

Leaving my hiding-place, I quickly retraced my steps to the public house in which I had been lodging, and went immediately to the hangar on the roof.

The place was deserted, and I was soon at the controls of my flier. I had now to run the chance of being stopped by a patrol boat, but this was a more or less remote contingency; as, except in cases of public emergency, little attention is paid to private fliers within the walls of the city.

However, to be on the safe side, I flew low, following dark avenues below the level of the roof tops; and in a short time I reached the vicinity of the building that was my goal.

Here I rose above the level of the roofs and, having located the building, settled gently to its roof.

The building had not been intended for this purpose, and there was neither hangar nor mooring rings; but there are seldom high winds on Mars, and this was a particularly quiet and windless night.

Leaving the deck of the flier, I searched the roof for some means of ingress to the building. I found a single small scuttle, but it was strongly secured from within, and I could not budge it—at least without making far too much noise.

Going to the edge of the building, overlooking the avenue, I looked down upon one of the balconies directly below me. I could have lowered myself from the eaves and, hanging by my hands, dropped directly onto it; but here again I faced the danger of attracting attention by the noise that I must make in alighting.

I examined the face of the building just below me and discovered that, in common with most Martian buildings, the carved ornamentation offered handholds and footholds sufficient to my need.

Slipping quietly over the eaves, I felt around with my toes until I found a projection that would support me. Then, releasing one hand, I felt for a new hold; and so, very slowly and carefully, I descended to the balcony.

I had selected the place of my descent so that I was opposite an unlighted window. For a moment I stood there listening. Somewhere within the interior of the building I heard subdued voices. Then I threw a leg over the sill and entered the darkness of the apartment beyond.

Slowly I groped my way to a wall and then followed along it until I came to a door at the end of the room opposite the window. Stealthily I felt for the latch and lifted it. I pulled gently; the door was not locked; it swung in toward me without noise.

Beyond the door was a corridor. It was very faintly illuminated, as though by reflected light from an open doorway or from another corridor. Now the sound of voices was more distinct. Silently I crept in the direction from which they came.

Presently I came to another corridor running at right angles to the one I was following. The light was stronger here, and I saw that it came from an open doorway farther along the corridor which I was about to enter. I was sure, however, that the voices did not come from this room that I could see, as they would have been far more clear and distinct had they.

My position was a precarious one. I knew nothing at all about the interior arrangements of the building. I did not know along which corridor its inmates came and went. If I were to approach the open doorway, I might place myself in a position where discovery would be certain.

I knew that I was dealing with killers, expert swordsmen all; and I did not try to deceive myself into believing that I would be any match for a dozen or more of them.

However, men who live by the sword are not unaccustomed to taking chances, sometimes far more desperate chances than their mission may seem to warrant.

Perhaps such was the case now, but I had come to Zodanga to learn what I could about the guild of assassins headed by the notorious Ur Jan; and now that fortune had placed me in a position where I might gain a great deal of useful information, I had no thought of retreating because a little danger confronted me.

Stealthily I crept forward, and at last I reached the door. Very cautiously I surveyed the interior of the room beyond, as I moved, inch by inch, across the doorway.

It was a small room, evidently an anteroom; and it was untenanted. There was some furniture in it—a table, some benches; and I noticed particularly an old-fashioned cupboard that stood diagonally across one corner of the room, one of its sides about a foot from the wall.

From where I stood in the doorway, I could now hear the voices quite distinctly; and I was confident that the men I sought were in the adjoining room just beyond.

I crept into the anteroom and approached the door at the opposite end. Just to the left of the door was the cupboard that I have mentioned.

I placed my car close to the panels of the door in an effort to overhear what was being said in the room beyond, but the words

came to me indistinct and muffled. This would never do. I could neither see nor hear anything under these conditions.

I decided that I must find some other point of approach and was turning to leave the room when I beard footsteps approaching along the corridor. I was trapped!

Chapter 4

DEATH BY NIGHT

On more than one occasion in my life have I been in tight places, but it seemed to me at the time that I had seldom before blundered into such a trap. The footsteps were approaching rapidly along the corridor. I could tell by their sound that they were made by more than one person.

If there were only two men, I might fight my way past them; but the noise of the encounter would attract those in the room behind me, and certainly any sort of a fight whatever would delay me long enough so that those who were attracted by it would be upon me before I could escape.

Escape! How could I escape if I were detected? Even if I could reach the balcony, they would be directly behind me; and I could not climb out of reach toward the roof before they could drag me down.

My position seemed rather hopeless, and then my eye fell upon the cupboard standing in the corner just beside me and the little foot wide crack between it and the wall.

The footsteps were almost opposite the doorway. There was no time to be lost.

Quickly I slipped behind the cupboard and waited.

Nor was I a moment too soon. The men in the corridor turned into the room almost immediately, so soon, in fact, that it seemed to me that they must have seen me; but evidently they had not, for

they crossed directly to the door to the inner chamber, which one of them threw open.

From my hiding place I could see this man plainly and also into the room beyond, while the shadow of the cupboard hid me from detection.

What I saw beyond that door gave me something to think about. There was a large room in the center of which was a great table, around which were seated at least fifty men—fifty of the toughest looking customers that I have ever seen gathered together. At the head of the table was a huge man whom I knew at once to be Ur Jan. He was a very large man, but well proportioned; and I could tell at a glance that he must be a most formidable fighter.

The man who had thrown open the door I could see also, but I could not see his companion or companions as they were hidden from me by the cupboard.

Ur Jan had looked up as the door opened. "What now?" he demanded. "Who have you with you?" and then, "Oh, I recognize him."

"He has a message for you, Ur Jan," said the man at the door. "He said it was a most urgent message, or I would not have brought him here."

"Let him come in," said Ur Jan. "We will see what he wants, and you return to your post."

"Go on in," said the man, turning to his companion behind him, "and pray to your first ancestor that your message interests Ur Jan; as otherwise you will not come out of that room again on your own feet."

He stood aside and I saw a man pass him and enter the room. It was Rapas the Rat.

Just seeing his back as he approached Ur Jan told me that he was nervous and terrified. I wondered what could have brought him here, for it was evident that he was not one of the guild. The same question evidently puzzled Ur Jan, as his next words indicated.

"What does Rapas the Ulsio want here?" he demanded.

"I have come as a friend," replied Rapas. "I have brought word to Ur Jan that he has long wanted."

"The best word that you could bring to me would be that

someone had slit your dirty throat," growled Ur Jan.

Rapas laughed—it was a rather weak and nervous laugh.

"The great Ur Jan likes his little joke," mumbled Rapas meekly.

The brute at the head of the table leaped to his feet and brought his clenched fist down heavily upon the solid sorapus wood top.

"What makes you think I joke, you miserable little slit throat? But you had better laugh while you can, for if you haven't some important word for me, if you have come here where it is forbidden that outsiders come, if you have interrupted this meeting for no good reason, I'll put a new mouth in your throat; but you won't be able to laugh through it."

"I just wanted to do you a favor," pleaded Rapas. "I was sure that you would like to have the information that I bring, or I would not have come."

"Well, quick! out with it, what is it?"

"I know who does Fal Sivas's killing."

Ur Jan laughed. It was rather a nasty laugh. "So do I" he bellowed; "it is Rapas the Ulsio."

"No, no, Ur Jan," cried Rapas, "you wrong me. Listen, Ur Jan."

"You have been seen entering and leaving the house of Fal Sivas," accused the assassin chief. "You are in his employ; and for what purpose would he employ such as you, unless it was to do his killing for him?"

"Yes, I went to the house of Fal Sivas. I went there often. He employed me as his bodyguard, but I only took the position so that I might spy upon him. Now that I have learned what I went there to learn, I have come straight to you."

"Well, what did you learn?"

"I have told you. I have learned who does his killing."

"Well, who is it, if it isn't you?"

"He has in his employ a stranger to Zodanga—a panthan named Vandor. It is this man who does the killing."

I could not repress a smile. Every man thinks that he is a great character reader; and when something like this occurs to substantiate his belief, he has reason to be pleased; and the more so because few men are really good judges of character, and it is

therefore very seldom that one of us is open to self congratulation on this score.

I had never trusted Rapas, and from the first I had set him down as a sneak and a traitor. Evidently he was all these.

Ur Jan glowered at him skeptically. "And why do you bring me this information? You are not my friend. You are not one of my people, and as far as I know you are the friend of none of us."

"But I wish to be," begged Rapas. "I risked my life to get this information for you because I want to join the guild and serve under the great Ur Jan. If that came to pass, it would be the proudest day of my life. Ur Jan is the greatest man in Zodanga—he is the greatest man on all Barsoom. I want to serve him, and I will serve him faithfully."

All men are susceptible to flattery, and oftentimes the more ignorant they are, the more susceptible. Ur Jan was no exception. One could almost see him preening himself. He squared his great shoulders and threw out his chest.

"Well," he said in a milder voice, "we'll think it over. Perhaps we can use you, but first you will have to arrange it so that we can dispose of this Vandor." He glanced quickly around the table. "Do any of you men know him?"

There was a chorus of denials—no one admitted to knowing me.

"I can point him out to you," said Rapas the Ulsio. "I can point him out this very night."

"What makes you think so?" asked Ur Jan.

"Because I have an engagement to meet him later on at an eating place that he frequents."

"Not a bad idea," said Ur Jan. "At what time is this meeting?"

"About half after the eighth zode," replied Rapas.

Ur Jan glanced quickly around the table. "Uldak," he said, "you go with Rapas; and don't return while this Vandor still lives."

I got a good look at Uldak as Ur Jan singled him out; and as I watched him come toward the door with Rapas on his way to kill me, I fixed every detail of the man's outward appearance indelibly upon my mind, even to his carriage as he walked; and though I saw him for but a moment then, I knew that I should never forget him.

As the two men left the larger chamber and crossed the anteroom in which I was concealed, Rapas explained to his companion the plan that he had in mind.

"I will take you now and show you the location of the eating place in which I am to meet him. Then you can return later and you will know that the man who is with me is the man whom you seek."

I could not but smile as the two men turned into the corridor and passed out of earshot. What would they and Ur Jan have thought, had they known that the object of their criminal purpose was within a few yards of them?

I wanted to follow Rapas and Uldak, for I had a plan that it would have been amusing to carry out; but I could not escape from behind the cupboard without passing directly in front of the doorway leading into the room where sat Ur Jan and his fifty assassins.

It looked as though I would have to wait until the meeting ended and the company had dispersed before I could make my way to the roof and my flier.

Although I was inclined to chafe at the thought of this enforced inactivity, I nevertheless took advantage of the open door to familiarize myself with the faces of all of the assassins that I could see. Some of them sat with their backs toward me, but even these occasionally revealed a glimpse of a profile.

It was fortunate that I took early advantage of this opportunity to implant the faces of my enemies upon my memory, for but a moment or two after Rapas and Uldak had left the room, Ur Jan looked up and noticed the open door and directed one of the assassins sitting near it to close it.

Scarcely had the lock clicked when I was out from behind the cupboard and into the corridor.

I saw no one and heard no sound in the direction that the assassins had used in coming into and going from the anteroom; and as my way led in the opposite direction, I had little fear of being apprehended. I moved rapidly toward the apartment through the window of which I had entered the building, as the success of the plan I had in mind depended upon my being able to reach the eating place ahead of Rapas and Uldak.

I reached the balcony and clambered to the roof of the building without mishap, and very shortly thereafter I was running my flier

into the hangar on the roof of the public house where I stored it. Descending to the street, I made my way to the vicinity of the eating place to which Rapas was conducting Uldak, reasonably certain that I should arrive there before that precious pair.

I found a place where I could watch the entrance in comparative safety from discovery, and there I waited. My vigil was not of long duration, for presently I saw the two approaching. They stopped at the intersection of two avenues a short distance from the place, and after Rapas had pointed it out to Uldak, the two separated, Rapas continuing on in the direction of the public house where I had first met him, while Uldak turned back into the avenue along which they had come from the rendezvous of the assassins.

It still lacked half a zode of the time that I was to meet Rapas, and for the moment at least I was not concerned with him—my business was with Uldak.

As soon as Rapas had passed me upon the opposite side of the street, I came out of my hiding place and walked rapidly in the direction that Uldak had taken.

As I reached the intersection of the two streets, I saw the assassin a little distance ahead of me. He was walking slowly, evidently merely killing time until he might be certain that the hour had arrived when I was to meet Rapas at the eating place.

Keeping to the opposite side of the street, I followed the man for a considerable distance until he entered a quarter that seemed to be deserted—I did not wish an audience for what I was about to do.

Crossing the avenue, I increased my gait; and the distance between us rapidly lessened until I was but a few paces behind him. I had moved very quietly, and he was not aware that anyone was near him. Only a few paces separated us when I spoke.

"You are looking for me?" I inquired.

He wheeled instantly, and his right hand flew to the hilt of his sword. He eyed me narrowly. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake," I said; "you are Uldak, are you not?"

"What of it?" he demanded.

I shrugged. "Nothing much, except that I understand that you have been sent to kill me. My name is Vandor."

As I ceased speaking, I whipped out my sword. He looked utterly astonished as I announced my identity, but there was nothing for him to do but defend himself, and as he drew his weapon he gave a nasty little laugh.

"You must be a fool," he said. "Anyone who is not a fool would run away and hide if he knew that Uldak was looking for him."

Evidently the man thought himself a great swordsman. I might have confused him by revealing my identity to him, for it might take the heart out of any Barsoomian warrior to know that he was facing John Carter; but I did not tell him. I merely engaged him and felt him out for a moment to ascertain if he could make good his boast.

He was, indeed, an excellent swordsman and, as I had expected, tricky and entirely unscrupulous. Most of these assassins are entirely without honor; they are merely killers.

At the very first he fought fairly enough because he thought that he could easily overcome me; but when he saw that he could not, he tried various shady expedients and finally he attempted the unpardonable thing with his free hand, he sought to draw his pistol.

Knowing his kind, I had naturally expected something of the sort; and in the instant that his fingers closed upon the butt of the weapon I struck his sword aside and brought the point of my own heavily upon his left wrist, nearly severing his hand.

With a scream of rage and pain, he fell back; and then I was upon him in earnest.

He yelled for mercy now and cried that he was not Uldak; that I had made a mistake, and begged me to let him go. Then the coward turned to flee, and I was forced to do that which I most disliked to do; but if I were to carry out my plan I could not let him live, and so I leaped close and ran my sword through his heart from behind.

Uldak lay dead upon his face.

As I drew my sword from his body, I looked quickly about me. No one was within sight. I turned the man over upon his back and with the point of my sword made a cross upon his breast above his heart.

Chapter 5

THE BRAIN

Rapas was waiting for me when I entered the eating-place. He looked very self-satisfied and contented.

"You are right on time," he said. "Did you find anything to amuse you in the night life of Zodanga?"

"Yes," I assured him. "I enjoyed myself immensely. And you?"

"I spent a most profitable evening. I made excellent connections; and, my dear Vandor, I did not forget you."

"How nice of you," I said.

"Yes, you shall have reason to remember this evening as long as you live," he exclaimed, and then he burst into laughter.

"You must tell me about it," I said.

"No, not now," he replied, "It must remain a secret for a time. You will know all about it soon enough, and now let us eat. It is my treat tonight. I shall pay for everything."

The miserable rat of a man seemed to have swelled with importance now that he felt himself almost a full-fledged member of Ur Jan's guild of assassins.

"Very well," I said, "this shall be your treat," for I thought it would add to my enjoyment of the joke to let the poor fool foot the bill, and to make it still more amusing I ordered the most expensive dishes that I could find.

When I had entered the eating-place, Rapas had already seated

himself facing the entrance; and he was continually glancing at it. Whenever anyone entered, I could see the look of expectation on his face change to one of disappointment.

We spoke of various unimportant things as we ate; and as the meal progressed, I could not but note his growing impatience and concern.

"What is the matter, Rapas?" I inquired after a while. "You seem suddenly nervous. You are always watching the entrance. Are you expecting someone?"

He got himself in hand then, very quickly; but he cast a single searching glance at me through narrowed lids. "No, no," he said, "I was expecting no one; but I have enemies. It is always necessary for me to be watchful."

His explanation was plausible enough, though I knew of course that it was not the right one. I could have told him that he was watching for someone who would never come, but I did not.

Rapas dragged the meal out as long as he could, and the later it grew, the more nervous he became and the more often his glance remained upon the entrance. At last I made a move to go, but he detained me. "Let us stop a little longer," he said. "You are in no hurry, are you?"

"I should be getting back," I replied. "Fal Sivas may require my services."

"No," he told me, "not before morning."

"But I must have some sleep," I insisted.

"You will get plenty of sleep," he said; "don't worry."

"Well, if I am going to, I had better start for bed," I said, and with that I arose.

He tried to detain me, but I had extracted about all the pleasure out of the evening that I thought it held for me, and so I insisted upon leaving.

Reluctantly he arose from the table. "I will walk a little way with you," he said.

We were near the door leading to the avenue when two men entered. They were discussing something rather excitedly as they greeted the proprietor.

"The Warlord's agents are at work again," said one of them.

"How is that?" asked the proprietor.

"They have just found the body of one of Ur Jan's assassins in the Avenue of the Green Throat—the cross of the Warlord was above his heart."

"More power to the Warlord," said the proprietor. "Zodanga would be better off if we were rid of all of them."

"By what name was the dead man known?" asked Rapas, with considerable more concern, I imagine, than he would have cared to reveal.

"Why, some man in the crowd said that he believed his name was Uldak," replied one of the two men who had brought the news.

Rapas paled.

"Was he a friend of yours, Rapas?" I asked.

The Ulsio started. "Oh, no," he said. "I did not know him. Let us be going."

Together we walked out into the avenue and started in the direction of the House of Fal Sivas. We walked shoulder to shoulder through the lighted district near the eating-place. Rapas was very quiet and seemed nervous. I watched him out of the comer of my eye and tried to read his mind, but he was on guard and had closed it against me.

Oftentimes I have an advantage over Martians in that I can read their minds, though they can never read mine. Why that is, I do not know. Mind reading is a very commonplace accomplishment on Mars, but to safeguard themselves against its dangers, all Martians have cultivated the ability to close their minds to others at will—a defense mechanism of such long standing as to have become almost a universal characteristic; so that only occasionally can one be caught off his guard.

As we entered the darker avenues, however, it became apparent that Rapas was trying to drop behind me; and then I did not have to read his mind to know what was in it—Uldak had failed, and now The Rat had an opportunity to cover himself with glory and win the esteem of Ur Jan by carrying out the assignment of Uldak.

If a man has a sense of humor, a situation such as this can be very enjoyable, as, indeed, it was to me. Here I was walking along a dark

avenue with a man who intended to murder me at the first opportunity, and it was necessary for me to thwart his plans without letting him know that I suspected them; for I did not want to kill Rapas the Ulsio, at least not at present. I felt that I could make use of him in one way or another without his ever suspecting that he was aiding me.

"Come," I said, at last, "why do you lag? Are you getting tired?" And I linked my left arm through his sword arm, and thus we continued on toward the house of Fal Sivas.

After a short distance, at the intersection of two avenues, Rapas disengaged himself. "I am leaving you here," he said; "I am not going back to the house of Fal Sivas tonight."

"Very well, my friend," I said; "but I shall be seeing you soon again, I hope."

"Yes," he replied, "soon."

"Tomorrow night, possibly," I suggested, "or if not tomorrow night, the night after. Whenever I am at liberty, I shall come to the eating-house; and perhaps I shall find you there."

"Very well," he said; "I eat there every night."

"May you sleep well, Rapas."

"May you sleep well, Vandor." Then he turned into the avenue at our left, and I proceeded on my way.

I thought that he might follow me, but he did not, and so I came at last to the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas admitted me, and after passing a few words with him I went directly to my quarters where, in answer to my signal, Zanda admitted me.

The girl told me that the house had been very quiet during the night, and that no one had disturbed her or attempted to enter our quarters. She had prepared my sleeping silks and furs; and, as I was rather tired, I soon sought them.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, I went on duty again at the door of Fal Sivas's study. I had been there but a short time when he summoned me to his person.

"What of last night?" he asked. "What luck did you have? I see that you are here alive; so I take it that you did not succeed in reaching the meeting-place of the assassins."

"On the contrary, I did," I told him. "I was in the room next to them and saw them all."

"What did you learn?"

"Not much. When the door was closed, I could hear nothing. It was open only a short time."

"What did you hear while it was open?" he asked.

"They knew that you had employed me as your body guard."

"What!" he demanded. "How could they have known that?"

I shook my head. "There must be a leak," I told him.

"A traitor!" he exclaimed.

I did not tell him about Rapas. I was afraid that he would have him killed, and I did not want him killed while he might be of use to me.

"What else did you hear?" he demanded.

"Ur Jan ordered that I be killed."

"You must be careful," said Fal Sivas. "Perhaps you had better not go out again at night."

"I can take care of myself," I replied, "and I can be of more service if I can get about at night and talk to people on the outside than I can by remaining cooped up here when I am off duty."

He nodded. "I guess you are right," he said, and then for a moment he sat in deep thought. Finally he raised his head. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "I know who the traitor is."

"Yes?" I asked politely.

"It is Rapas the Ulsio—Ulsio! He is well named."

"You are sure?" I asked.

"It could be no one else," replied Fal Sivas emphatically. "No one else has left the premises but you two since you came. But we will put an end to that as soon as he returns. When he comes back, you will destroy him. Do you understand?"

I nodded.

"It is a command," he said; "see that it is obeyed." For some time he sat in silence, and I could see that he was studying me intently. At last he spoke.

"You have a smattering of the sciences I judge from the fact of

your interest in the books in your quarters."

"Only a smattering," I assured him.

"I need such a man as you," he said, "if I could only find someone whom I might trust. But who can one trust?" He seemed to be thinking aloud. "I am seldom wrong," he continued musingly. "I read Rapas like a book. I knew that he was mean and ignorant and at heart a traitor."

He wheeled suddenly upon me. "But you are different. I believe that I can take a chance with you, but if you fail me-" he stood up and faced me, and I never saw such a malevolent expression upon a human face before. "If you fail me, Vandor, you shall die such a death as only the mind of Fal Sivas can conceive."

I could not help but smile. "I can die but once," I said.

"But you can be a long time at the dying, if it is done scientifically." But now he had relaxed, and his tone was a little bantering. I could imagine that Fal Sivas might enjoy seeing an enemy die horribly.

"I am going to take you into my confidence—a little just a little," he said.

"Remember that I have not asked it," I replied, "that I have not sought to learn any of your secrets."

"The risk will be mutual," he said, "your life against my secrets. Come, I have something to show you."

He led me from the room, along the corridor past my quarters, and up the ramp to the forbidden level above. Here we passed through a magnificently appointed suite of living quarters and then through a little door hidden behind hangings, and came at last into an enormous loft that extended upward to the roof of the building, evidently several levels above us.

Supported by scaffolding and occupying nearly the entire length of the enormous chamber, was the strangest looking craft that I have ever seen. The nose was ellipsoidal; and from the greatest diameter of the craft, which was just back of the nose, it sloped gradually to a point at the stem.

"There it is," said Fal Sivas, proudly; "the work of a lifetime, and almost completed."

"An entirely new type of ship," I commented. "In what respect is it

superior to present types?"

"It is built to achieve results that no other ship can achieve," replied Fal Sivas. "It is designed to attain speed beyond the wildest imaginings of man. It will travel routes that no man or ship has ever traveled.

"In that craft, Vandor, I can visit Thuria and Cluros. I can travel the far reaches of space to other planets."

"Marvellous," I said.

"But that is not all. You see that it is built for speed. I can assure you that it is built to withstand the most terrific pressure, that it is insulated against the extremes of heat and cold. Perhaps, Vandor, other inventors could have accomplished the same end. In fact, I believe Gar Nal has already done so, but there is only one man upon Barsoom, doubtless there is only one brain in the entire Solar System, that could have done what Fal Sivas has done. I have given that seemingly insensate mechanism a brain with which to think. I have perfected my mechanical brain, Vandor, and with just a little more time, just a few refinements, I can send this ship out alone; and it will go where I wish it to go and come back again.

"Doubtless, you think that impossible. You think Fal Sivas is mad; but look! Watch closely."

He centered his gaze upon the nose of the strange-looking craft, and presently I saw it rise slowly from its scaffolding for about ten feet and hang there poised in mid-air. Then it elevated its nose a few feet, and then its tail, and finally it settled again and rested evenly upon its scaffolding.

I was certainly astonished. Never in all my life had I seen anything so marvellous, nor did I seek to hide my admiration from Fal Sivas.

"You see," he said, "I did not even have to speak to it. The mechanical mind that I have installed in the ship responds to thought waves. I merely have to impart to it the impulse of the thought that I wish it to act upon. The mechanical brain then functions precisely as my brain would, and directs the mechanism that operates the craft precisely as the brain of the pilot would direct his hand to move levers, press buttons, open or close throttles.

"Vandor, it has been a long and terrible battle that I have had to

wage to perfect this marvellous mechanism. I have been compelled to do things which would revolt the finer sensibilities of mankind; but I believe that it has all been well worthwhile. I believe that my greatest achievement warrants all that it has cost in lives and suffering.

"I, too, have paid a price. It has taken something out of me that can never be replaced. I believe, Vandor, that it has robbed me of every human instinct. Except that I am mortal, I am as much a creature of cold insensate formulas as that thing which you see resting there before you. Sometimes, because of that, I hate it; and yet I would die for it. I would see others die for it, countless others, in the future, as I have in the past. It must live. It is the greatest achievement of the human mind."

Chapter 6

THE SHIP

Every one of us, I believe, is possessed of two characters. Oftentimes they are so much alike that this duality is not noticeable, but again there is a divergence so great that we have the phenomenon of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in a single individual. The brief illuminating self-revealment of Fal Sivas suggested that he might be an example of such wide divergence in character.

He seemed immediately to regret this emotional outburst and turned again to an explanation of his invention.

"Would you like to see the inside of it?" he asked.

"Very much," I replied.

He concentrated his attention again upon the nose of the ship, and presently a door in its side opened and a rope ladder was lowered to the floor of the room.

It was an uncanny procedure—just as though ghostly hands had performed the work.

Fal Sivas motioned me to precede him up the ladder. It was a habit of his to see that no one ever got behind him that bespoke the nervous strain under which he lived, always in fear of assassination.

The doorway led directly into a small, comfortably, even luxuriously furnished cabin.

"The stem is devoted to storerooms where food may be carried for long voyages," explained Fal Sivas. "Also aft are the motors, the

oxygen and water-generating machines, and the temperature-regulating plant. Forward is the control room. I believe that that will interest you greatly," and he motioned me to precede him through a small door in the forward bulkhead of the cabin.

The interior of the control room, which occupied the entire nose of the ship, was a mass of intricate mechanical and electrical devices.

On either side of the nose were two large, round ports in which were securely set thick slabs of crystal.

From the exterior of the ship these two ports appeared like the huge eyes of some gigantic monster; and, in truth, this was the purpose they served.

Fal Sivas called my attention to a small, round metal object about the size of a large grapefruit that was fastened securely just above and between the two eyes.

From it ran a large cable composed of a vast number of very small insulated wires. I could see that some of these wires connected with the many devices in the control room, and that others were carried through conduits to the after part of the craft.

Fal Sivas reached up and laid a hand almost affectionately upon the spherical object to which he had called my attention. "This," he said, "is the brain."

Then he called my attention to two spots, one in the exact center of each crystal of the forward ports. I had not noticed them at first, but now I saw that they were ground differently from the balance of the crystals.

"These lenses," explained Fal Sivas, "focus upon this aperture in the lower part of the brain," and he called my attention to a small hole at the base of the sphere, "that they may transmit to the brain what the eyes of the ship see. The brain then functions mechanically precisely as the human brain does, except with greater accuracy."

"It is incredible!" I exclaimed.

"But, nevertheless, true," he replied. "In one respect, however, the brain lacks human power. It cannot originate thoughts. Perhaps that is just as well, for could it, I might have loosed upon myself and Barsoom an insensate monster that could wreak incalculable havoc

before it could be destroyed, for this ship is equipped with high-power radium rifles which the brain has the power to discharge with far more deadly accuracy than may be achieved by man."

"I saw no rifles," I said.

"No," he replied. "They are encased in the bulkheads, and nothing of them is visible except small round holes in the hull of the ship. But, as I was saying, the one weakness of the mechanical brain is the very thing that makes it so effective for the use of man. Before it can function, it must be charged by human thought-waves. In other words, I must project into the mechanism the originating thoughts that are the food for its functioning.

"For example, I charge it with the thought that it is to rise straight up ten feet, pause there for a couple of seconds, and then come to rest again upon its scaffolding.

"To carry the idea into a more complex domain, I might impart to it the actuating thought that it is to travel to Thuria, seek a suitable landing place, and come to the ground. I could carry this idea even further, warning it that if it were attacked it should repel its enemies with rifle fire and maneuver so as to avoid disaster, returning immediately to Barsoom, rather than suffer destruction.

"It is also equipped with cameras, with which I could instruct it to take pictures while it was on the surface of Thuria."

"And you think it will do these things, Fal Sivas?" I asked.

He growled at me impatiently. "Of course it will. Just a few more days and I will have the last detail perfected. It is a minor matter of motor gearing with which I am not wholly satisfied."

"Perhaps I can help you there," I said. "I have learned several tricks in gearing during my long life in the air."

He became immediately interested and directed me to return to the floor of his hangar. He followed me down, and presently we were pouring over the drawings of his motor.

I soon found what was wrong with it and how it might be improved. Fal Sivas was delighted. He immediately recognized the value of the points I had made.

"Come with me," he said; "we will start work on these changes at once."

He led me to a door at one end of the hangar and, throwing it

open, followed me into the room beyond.

Here, and in a series of adjoining rooms, I saw the most marvellously equipped mechanical and electrical shops that I have ever seen; and I saw something else, something that made me shudder as I considered the malignity of this man's abnormal obsession for secrecy in the development of his inventions.

The shops were well manned by mechanics, and every one of them was manacled to his bench or to his machine. Their complexions were pasty from long confinement, and in their eyes was the hopelessness of despair.

Fal Sivas must have noted the expression upon my face; for he said quite suddenly, and apropos of nothing else than my own thoughts, "I have to do it, Vandor; I cannot take the risk of one of them escaping and revealing my secrets to the world before I am ready."

"And when will that time come?" I asked.

"Never," he exclaimed, with a snarl. "When Fal Sivas dies, his secrets die with him. While he lives, they will make him the most powerful man in the universe. Why, even John Carter, Warlord of Mars, will have to bend the knee to Fal Sivas."

"And these poor devils, then, will remain here all their lives?" I asked.

"They should be proud and happy," he said, "for are they not dedicating themselves to the most glorious achievement that the mind of man has ever conceived?"

"There is nothing, Fal Sivas, more glorious than freedom," I told him.

"Keep your silly sentimentalism to yourself," he snapped. "There is no place for sentiment in the house of Fal Sivas. If you are to be of value to me, you must think only of the goal, forgetting the means whereby we attain it."

Well, I saw that I could accomplish nothing for myself or his poor victims by antagonizing him, and so I deferred with a shrug. "Of course, you are right, Fal Sivas," I agreed.

"That is better," he said, and then he called a foreman and together we explained the changes that were to be made in the motor.

As we turned away and left the chamber, Fal Sivas sighed. "Ah," he said, "if I could but produce my mechanical brain in quantities. I could do away with all these stupid humans. One brain in each room could perform all the operations that it now takes from five to twenty men to perform and perform them better, too—much better."

Fal Sivas went to his laboratory on the same level then, and told me that he would not require me for a while but that I should remain in my quarters and keep the door open, seeing that no unauthorized person passed along the corridor toward the ramp leading to his laboratories.

When I reached my quarters, I found Zanda polishing the metal on an extra set of harness that she said Fal Sivas had sent to me for my use.

"I was talking with Hamas's slave a little while ago," she remarked, presently.

"She says that Hamas is worried about you."

"And why?" I asked.

"He thinks that the master has taken a fancy to you, and he fears for his own authority. He has been a very powerful man here for many years."

I laughed. "I don't aspire to his laurels," I told her.

"But he does not know that," said Zanda. "He would not believe it, if he were told. He is your enemy and a very powerful enemy. I just wanted to warn you."

"Thanks, Zanda," I said. "I shall be watchful of him, but I have a great many enemies; and I am so accustomed to having them that another, more or less, makes little difference to me."

"Hamas may make a great difference to you," she said. "He has the ear of Fal Sivas. I am so worried about you, Vandor."

"You mustn't worry; but if it will make you feel any better, do not forget that you have the ear of Hamas through his slave. You can let her know that I have no ambition to displace Hamas."

"That is a good idea," she said, "but I am afraid that it will not accomplish much; and if I were you, the next time I went out of the building, I should not return. You went last night, so I suppose that you are free to come and go as you will."

"Yes," I replied, "I am."

"Just as long as Fal Sivas does not take you to the floor above and reveal any of his secrets to you, you will probably be allowed to go out, unless Hamas makes it a point to prevail upon Fal Sivas to take that privilege away from you."

"But I have already been to the level above," I said, "and I have seen many of the wonders of Fal Sivas's inventions."

She gave little cry of alarm, then. "Oh, Vandor, you are lost!" she cried. "Now you will never leave this terrible place."

"On the contrary, I shall leave it tonight, Zanda," I told her. "Fal Sivas has agreed that I should do so."

She shook her head. "I cannot understand it," she said, "and I shall not believe it until after you have gone."

Toward evening Fal Sivas sent for me. He said that he wanted to talk to me about some further changes in the gearing of the motor, and so I did not get out that night, and the next day he had me in the shops directing the mechanics who were working on the new gears, and again he made it impossible for me to leave the premises.

In one way or another, he prevented it night after night; and though he didn't actually refuse permission, I began to feel that I was, indeed, a prisoner.

However, I was much interested in the work in the shops and did not mind much whether I went out or not.

Ever since I had seen Fal Sivas's wonder-craft and had listened to his explanation of the marvellous mechanical brain that controlled it, it had been constantly in my thoughts. I saw in it all the possibilities of power for good or evil that Fal Sivas had visualized, and I was intrigued by the thought of what the man who controlled it could accomplish.

If that man had the welfare of humanity at heart, his invention might prove a priceless boon to Barsoom; but I feared that Fal Sivas was too selfish and too mad for power to use his invention solely for the public good.

Such meditation naturally led me to wonder if another than Fal Sivas could control the brain. The speculation intrigued me, and I determined to ascertain at the first opportunity if the insensate thing would respond to my will.

That afternoon Fal Sivas was in his laboratory, and I was working in the shops with the poor manacled artisans. The great ship lay in the adjoining room. Now, I thought, presented as good a time as any to make my experiment.

The creatures in the room with me were all slaves. Furthermore, they hated Fal Sivas; so it made no difference to them what I did.

I had been kind to them and had even encouraged them to hope, though they could not believe that there was any hope. They had seen too many of their number die in their chains to permit them to entertain a thought of escape. They were apathetic in all matters, and I doubt that any of them noticed when I left the shop and entered the hangar where the ship rested upon its scaffolding.

Closing the door behind me, I approached the nose of the craft and focused my thoughts upon the brain within. I imparted to it the will to rise from its scaffolding as I had seen Fal Sivas cause it to do and then to settle down again in its place. I thought that if I could cause it to do that, I could cause it to do anything that Fal Sivas could.

I am not easily excited; but I must confess that my every nerve was tense as I watched that great thing above me, wondering if it would respond to those invisible thought-waves that I was projecting into it.

Concentrating thus upon this one thing naturally curtailed the other activities of my mind, but even so I had visions of what I might accomplish if my experiment proved successful.

I presume that I had been there but a moment, yet it seemed a long while; and then slowly the great craft rose as though lifted by an invisible hand. It hovered for a moment ten feet above its scaffolding, and then it settled down to rest again.

As it did so, I heard a noise behind me; and, turning quickly, I saw Fal Sivas standing in the doorway of the shop.

Chapter 7

THE FACE IN THE DOORWAY

Nonchalance is a corollary of poise. I was thankful at that moment that the poise gene of some ancient forebear had been preserved in my line and handed down to me. Whether or not Fal Sivas had entered the room before the ship came to rest again upon its scaffolding, I did not know. If not, he had only missed the sight by a matter of a split second. My best momentary defense was to act on the assumption that he had not seen, and this I determined to do.

Standing there in the doorway, the old inventor was eyeing me sternly. "What are you doing in here?" he demanded.

"The invention fascinates me; it intrigues my imagination," I replied. "I stepped in from the shop to have another look at it. You had not told me that I should not do so."

He knitted his brows in thought. "Perhaps, I didn't," he said at last; "but I tell you now. No one is supposed to enter this room, unless by my express command."

"I will bear that in mind," I said.

"It will be well for you if you do, Vandor."

I walked then toward the door where he stood, with the intention of returning to the shop; but Fal Sivas barred my way.

"Wait a moment," he said, "perhaps you have been wondering if the brain would respond to your thought-impulses."

"Frankly, I have," I replied.

I wondered how much he knew, how much he had seen. Perhaps he was playing with me, secure in his own knowledge; or perhaps he was merely suspicious and was seeking confirmation of his suspicion. However that might be, I was determined not to be trapped out of my assumption that he had not seen and did not know.

"You were not, by any chance, attempting to see if it would respond?" he asked.

"Who, other than a stupid dolt, once having seen this invention, would not naturally harbor such a thought?" I asked.

"Quite right, quite right," he admitted; "it would only be natural, but did you succeed?" The pupils of his eyes contracted; his lids narrowed to two ominous slits. He seemed to be trying to bore into my soul; and, unquestionably, he was attempting to read my mind; but that, I knew, he could not accomplish.

I waved my hand in the direction of the ship. "Has it moved?" I asked with a laugh.

I thought that I saw just a faint hint of relief in his expression, and I felt sure then that he had not seen.

"It would be interesting, however, to know whether the mind of another than myself could control the mechanism," he said. "Suppose you try it."

"It would be a most interesting experiment. I should be glad to do so. What shall I try to have it do?"

"It will have to be an original idea of your own," he told me; "for if it is my idea, and I impart it to you, we cannot be definitely sure whether the impulse that actuates it originated in your brain or mine."

"Is there no danger that I might unintentionally harm it?" I asked.

"I think not," he replied. "It is probably difficult for you to realize that that ship sees and reasons. Of course, its vision and its mental functioning are purely mechanical but none the less accurate. In fact, I should rather say, because of that, more accurate. You might attempt to win the ship to leave the room. It cannot do so because the great doors through which it will eventually pass out of this building are closed and locked. It might approach the wall of the

building, but the eyes would see that it could not pass through without damage; or, rather, the eyes would see the obstacle, transmit the impression to the brain, and the brain would reason to a logical conclusion. It would, therefore, stop the ship or, more likely, cause it to turn the nose about so that the eyes could seek a safe avenue of exit. But let us see what you can do."

I had no intention of letting Fal Sivas know that I could operate his invention, if he did not already know it; and so I tried to keep my thoughts as far from it as possible. I recalled football games that I had seen, a five-ring circus, and the Congress of Beauties on the Midway of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. In fact, I tried to think of anything under the sun rather than Fal Sivas and his mechanical brain.

Finally, I turned to him with a gesture of resignation. "Nothing seems to happen," I said.

He appeared vastly relieved. "You are a man of intelligence," he said. "If it will not obey you, it is reasonably safe to assume that it will obey no one but me."

For several moments he was lost in thought, and then he straightened up and looked at me, and his eyes burned with demoniac fire. "I can be master of a world," he said; "perhaps I can even be master of the universe."

"With that?" I asked, nodding toward the ship.

"With the idea that it symbolizes," he replied; "with the idea of an inanimate object energized lay scientific means and motivated by a mechanical brain. If I but had the means to do so—the wealth—I could manufacture these brains in great quantities, and I could put them into small fliers weighing less than a man weighs. I could give them means of locomotion in the air or upon the ground. I could give them arms and hands. I could furnish them with weapons. I could send them out in great hordes to conquer the world. I could send them to other planets. They would know neither pain nor fear. They would have no hopes, no aspirations, no ambitions that might wean them from my service. They would be the creatures of my will alone, and the things that I sent them to do they would persist in until they were destroyed.

"But destroying them would serve my enemies no purpose; for faster than they could destroy them, my great factories would turn

out more."

"You see," he said, "how it would work?" and he came close and spoke almost in a whisper. "The first of these mechanical men I would make with my own hands, and as I created them I would impel them to create others of their kind. They would become my mechanics, the workmen in my factories; and they would work day and night without rest, always turning out more and more of their kind. Think how rapidly they would multiply."

I was thinking of this. The possibilities astounded and stunned me. "But it would take vast wealth," I told him.

"Yes, vast wealth," he repeated; "and it was for the purpose of obtaining this vast wealth that I built this ship."

"You intend to raid the treasure houses of the great cities of Barsoom?" I asked, smiling.

"By no means," he replied. "Treasures vastly richer lie at the disposal of the man who controls this ship. Do you not know what the spectroscope tells us of the riches of Thuria?"

"I have heard," I said, "but I never took much stock in it. The story was too fabulous."

"It is true, nevertheless," he said. "There must be mountains of gold and platinum on Thuria, and vast plains carpeted with precious stones."

It was a bold enterprise; but after having seen this craft, and knowing the remarkable genius of Fal Sivas, I had little doubt but that it was feasible.

Suddenly, as was his way, he seemed to regret that he had confided in me and brusquely directed me to return to my duties in the shop.

The old man had told me so much now that I naturally began to wonder if he would consider it safe to permit me to live, and I was constantly on my guard. It seemed highly improbable that he would consent to my leaving the premises, but I determined to settle this question immediately; for I wanted to see Rapas before he could visit the establishment of Fal Sivas again, thereby compelling me to destroy him. Day after day had passed and Fal Sivas had contrived to prevent my leaving the house, though he had accomplished it so adroitly that it was never actually apparent that he did not wish me

to leave.

As he dismissed me that evening, I told him that I was going out to try to locate Rapas and attempt again to contact the assassins of Ur Jan.

He hesitated so long before he replied that I thought he was going to forbid me going out, but at last he nodded in acquiescence. "Perhaps it will be as well," he said. "Rapas does not come here any more, and he knows too much to be at large, unless he is in my service and loyal to me. If I must trust one of you, I prefer that it be you, rather than Rapas."

I did not go to the evening meal with the others, as I intended eating at the place that Rapas frequented and where we had planned to meet when I was at liberty.

It was necessary to acquaint Hamas with the fact that I was leaving, as only he could open the outer door for me. His manner toward me was not quite as surly as it had been the past few days. In fact, he was almost affable; and the change in his manner put me even more on my guard, for I felt that it boded me no good—there was no reason why Hamas should love me any more today than he had yesterday. If I induced pleasant anticipations in him, it must be because he visualized something unpleasant befalling me.

From the house of Fal Sivas, I went directly to the eating-place; and there I inquired of the proprietor regarding Rapas.

"He has been in every evening," replied the man. "He usually comes about this time and again about half after the eighth zode, and he always asks me if you have been here."

"I will wait for him," I said, and I went to the table The Rat and I usually occupied.

I had scarcely seated myself before Rapas entered. He came directly to the table and seated himself opposite me.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" he demanded. "I was commencing to think that old Fal Sivas had made away with you or that you were a prisoner in his house. I had about made up my mind to go there tonight and call on the old man, so that I could learn what had happened to you."

"It is just as well that I got out tonight before you came," I said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because it is not safe for you to go to the house of Fal Sivas," I told him.

"If you value your life, you will never go there again."

"What makes you think that?" he demanded.

"I can't tell you," I replied, "but just take my word for it, and keep away." I did not want him to know that I had been commissioned to kill him. It might have made him so suspicious and fearful of me that he would be of no value to me in the future.

"Well, it is strange," he said; "Fal Sivas was friendly enough before I took you there."

I saw that he was harboring in his mind the thought that, for some reason, I was trying to keep him away from Fal Sivas; but I couldn't help it, and so I changed the subject.

"Has everything been going well with you, Rapas, since I saw you?" I asked.

"Yes, quite well," he replied.

"What is the news of the city? I have not been out since I saw you last, and of course we hear little or nothing in the house of Fal Sivas."

"They say that the Warlord is in Zodanga," he replied. "Uldak, one of Ur Jan's men, was killed the last night I saw you, as you will recall. The mark of the Warlord's agent was above his heart, but Ur Jan believes that no ordinary swordsman could have bested Uldak. Also he has learned from his agent in Helium that John Carter is not there; so, putting the two facts together, Ur Jan is convinced that he must be in Zodanga."

"How interesting," I commented. "And what is Ur Jan going to do about it?"

"Oh, he'll get his revenge," said The Rat; "if not in one way, then in another. He is already planning; and when he strikes, John Carter will wish that he had attended to his own affairs and left Ur Jan alone."

Shortly before we finished our meal, a customer entered the place and took a seat alone at a table across the room. I could see him in a mirror in front of me. I saw him glance in our direction, and then I looked quickly at Rapas and saw his eyes flash a message as he nodded his head very slightly; but without that, I would have

known why the man was there, for I recognized him as one of the assassins that had sat at the council with Ur Jan. I pretended not to notice anything; and my glance wandered idly to the doorway, attracted by two customers who were leaving the place at the time.

Then I saw something else of interest—of vital interest. As the door swung open, I saw a man outside looking in. It was Hamas.

The assassin at the table across the room ordered only a glass of wine; and when he had drunk it, he arose and left. Shortly after his departure, Rapas got up.

"I must be going," he said; "I have an important engagement."

"Shall I see you tomorrow night?" I asked.

I could see him attempt to suppress a grin. "I shall be here tomorrow night," he said.

We went out then onto the avenue; and Rapas left me, while I turned my steps in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas. Through the lighted districts I did not have to be particularly on my guard; but when I entered the darker sections of the city, I was watchful; and presently I saw a figure lurking in a dark doorway. I knew it was the assassin waiting to kill me.

Chapter 8

SUSPICION

Cluros, the farther moon, rode high in the heavens, lighting dimly the streets of Zodanga like a dusty bulb in a huge loft; but I needed no better light to see the shadowy form of the man awaiting my coming.

I knew precisely what was in the man's mind, and I must have smiled. He thought that I was coming along in total ignorance of his presence or the fact that anyone was planning upon murdering me that night. He was saying to himself that after I had passed he would spring out and run his sword through my back; it would be a very simple matter, and then he would go back and report to Ur Jan.

As I approached the doorway, I paused and cast a hasty glance behind me. I wanted to make sure, if I could, that Rapas had not followed me. If I killed this man, I did not want Rapas to know that it was I.

Now I resumed my way, keeping a few paces from the building so that I would not be too close to the assassin when I came opposite his hiding place.

When I did come opposite it, I turned suddenly and faced it. "Come out of there, you fool," I said in a low voice.

For a moment the man did not move. He seemed utterly stunned by his discovery and by my words.

"You and Rapas thought that you could fool me, didn't you?" I

inquired. "You and Rapas and Ur Jan! Well, I will tell you a secret—something that Rapas and Ur Jan do not dream. Because you are trying to kill the wrong man, you are not using the right method. You think that you are attempting to kill Vandor, but you are not. There is no such person as Vandor. The man who faces you is John Carter, Warlord of Mars." I whipped out my sword. "And now if you are quite ready, you may come out and be killed."

At that, he came forth slowly, his long sword in his hand. I thought that his eyes showed a trace of astonishment and his voice certainly did, as he whispered, "John Carter!"

He did not show any fear, and I was glad of that, for I dislike fighting with a man who is really terrified of me, as he starts his fight with a terrible handicap that he can never overcome.

"So you are John Carter!" he said, as he stepped out into the open, and then he commenced to laugh. "You think you can frighten me, do you? You are a first-class liar, Vandor; but if you were all the first-class liars on Barsoom rolled into one, you could not frighten Povak."

Evidently he did not believe me, and I was rather glad of it, for the encounter would now afford me far richer sport as there was gradually revealed to my antagonist the fact that he was pitted against a master swordsman.

As he engaged me, I saw that, while in no respect a mean swordsman, he was not as proficient as had been Uldak. I should have been glad to have played with him for a while, but I could not risk the consequences of being discovered.

So vicious was my attack that I soon pressed him back against the wall of the building. He had had no opportunity to do more than defend himself, and now he was absolutely at my mercy.

I could have run him through on the instant, but instead I reached out quickly with my point and made a short cut upon his breast and then I made another across it.

I stepped back then and lowered my point. "Look at your breast, Povak," I said.

"What do you see there?"

He glanced down at his breast, and I saw him shudder. "The mark of the Warlord," he gasped, and then, "Have mercy upon me; I did

not know that it was you."

"I told you," I said, "but you wouldn't believe me; and if you had believed me, you would have been all the more anxious to kill me. Ur Jan would have rewarded you handsomely."

"Let me go," he begged. "Spare my life, and I will be your slave forever."

I saw then that he was a craven coward, and I felt no pity for him but only contempt.

"Raise your point," I snapped, "and defend yourself, or I shall run you through in your tracks."

Suddenly, with death staring him in the face, he seemed to go mad. He rushed at me with the fury of a maniac, and the impetuosity of his attack sent me back a few steps, and then I parried a terrific thrust and ran him through the heart.

At a little distance from me, I saw some people coming, attracted by the clash of steel.

A few steps took me to the entrance of a dark alleyway into which I darted; and by a circuitous route, I continued on my way to the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas admitted me. He was very cordial. In fact, far too cordial. I felt like laughing in his face because of what I knew that he did not know that I knew, but I returned his greeting civilly and passed on to my quarters.

Zanda was waiting up for me. I drew my sword and handed it to her.

"Rapas?" she asked. I had told her that Fal Sivas had commanded me to kill The Rat.

"No, not Rapas," I replied. "Another of Ur Jan's men."

"That makes two," she said.

"Yes," I replied; "but remember, you must not tell anyone that it was I who killed them."

"I shall not tell anyone, my master," she replied. "You may always trust Zanda."

She cleaned the blood from the blade and then dried and polished it.

I watched her as she worked, noticing her shapely hands and

graceful fingers. I had never paid very much attention to her before. Of course, I had known that she was young and well-formed and good-looking; but suddenly I was impressed by the fact that Zanda was very beautiful and that with the harness and jewels and hair-dressing of a great lady, she would have been more than noticeable in any company.

"Zanda," I remarked at last, "you were not born a slave, were you?"

"No, master."

"Did Fal Sivas buy you or abduct you?" I asked.

"Phystal and two slaves took me one night when I was on the avenues with an escort. They killed him and brought me here."

"Your people," I asked, "are they still living?"

"No," she replied; "my father was an officer in the old Zodangan Navy. He was of the lesser nobility. He was killed when John Carter led the green hordes of Thark upon the city. In grief, my mother took the last long journey on the bosom of the sacred Iss to the Valley Dor and the Lost Sea of Korus.

"John Carter!" she said, musingly, and her voice was tinged with loathing. "He was the author of all my sorrows, of all my misfortune. Had it not been for John Carter robbing me of my parents I should not be here now, for I should have had their watchful care and protection to shield me from all danger."

"You feel very bitterly toward John Carter, don't you?" I asked.

"I hate him," she replied.

"You would be glad to see him dead, I suppose."

"Yes."

"You know, I presume, that Ur Jan has sworn to destroy him?"

"Yes, I know that," she replied; "and I constantly pray that he will be successful. Were I a man, I should enlist under the banner of Ur Jan. I should be an assassin and search out John Carter myself."

"They say he is a formidable swordsman," I suggested.

"I should find a way to kill him, even if I had to descend to the dagger or poison."

I laughed. "I hope, for John Carter's sake, that you do not recognize him when you meet him."

"I shall know him all right," she said. "His white skin will betray him."

"Well, let us hope that he escapes you," I said laughingly, as I bade her good night and went to my sleeping silks and furs.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, Fal Sivas sent for me. As I entered his study, I saw Hamas and two slaves standing near him.

Fal Sivas looked up at me from beneath lowering brows. He did not greet me pleasantly as was his wont.

"Well," he snapped, "did you destroy Rapas last night?"

"No," I replied; "I did not."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him and talked with him. In fact, I ate the evening meal with him."

I could see that this admission surprised both Fal Sivas and Hamas. It was evident that it rather upset their calculations, for I judged that they had expected me to deny having seen Rapas, which I might have done had it not been for the fortunate circumstance that had permitted me to discover Hamas spying upon me.

"Why didn't you kill him?" demanded Fal Sivas. "Did I not order you to do so?"

"You employed me to protect you, Fal Sivas," I replied; "and you must rely upon my judgment to do it in my own way. I am neither a child nor a slave. I believe that Rapas has made connections that will be far more harmful to you than Rapas, himself; and by permitting him to live and keeping in touch with him, I shall be able to learn much that will be to your advantage that I could never learn if I destroyed Rapas. If you are not satisfied with my methods, get someone else to protect you; and if you have decided to destroy me, I suggest that you enlist some warriors. These slaves would be no match for me."

I could see Hamas trembling with suppressed rage at that, but he did not dare say anything or do anything until Fal Sivas gave him the word. He just stood there fingering the hilt of his sword and watching Fal Sivas questioningly, as though he awaited a signal.

But Fal Sivas gave him no signal. Instead, the old inventor sat

there studying me intently for several minutes. At last he sighed and shook his head. "You are a very courageous man, Vandor," he said; "but perhaps a little overconfident and foolish. No one speaks to Fal Sivas like that. They are all afraid. Do you not realize that I have it within my power to destroy you at any moment?"

"If you were a fool, Fal Sivas, I might expect death this moment; but you are no fool. You know that I can serve you better alive than dead, and perhaps you also suspect what I know—that if I went out I should not go alone. You would go with me."

Hamas looked horrified and grasped the hilt of his sword firmly, as though about to draw it; but Fal Sivas leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"You are quite right, Vandor," he said; "and you may rest assured that if I ever decide that you must die, I shall not be within reach of your sword when that sad event occurs. And now tell me what you expect to learn from Rapas and what makes you believe that he has information that will be of value to me?"

"That will be for your ears, alone, Fal Sivas," I said, glancing at Hamas and the two slaves.

Fal Sivas nodded to them. "You may go," he said.

"But, master," objected Hamas, "you will be left alone with this man. He may kill you."

"I shall be no safer from his sword if you are present, Hamas," replied the master. "I have seen and you have seen how deftly he wields his blade."

Hamas's red skin darkened at that; and without another word he left the room, followed by the two slaves.

"And now," said Fal Sivas, "tell me what you have learned or what you suspect."

"I have reason to believe," I replied, "that Rapas has made connections with Ur Jan. Ur Jan, as you have told me, has been employed by Gar Nal to assassinate you. By keeping in touch with Rapas, it is possible that I may be able to learn some of Ur Jan's plans. I do not know of course, but it is the only contact we have with the assassins, and it would be poor strategy to destroy it."

"You are absolutely right, Vandor," he replied. "Contact Rapas as often as you can, and do not destroy him until he can be of no more

value to us. Then-" his face was contorted by a fiendish grimace.

"I thought that you would concur in my judgment," I replied. "I am particularly anxious to see Rapas again tonight."

"Very well," he said, "and now let us go to the shop. The work on the new motor is progressing nicely, but I want you to check over what has been done."

Together we went to the shop; and after inspecting the work, I told Fal Sivas that I wanted to go to the motor room of the ship to take some measurements.

He accompanied me, and together we entered the hull. When I had completed my investigation I sought an excuse to remain longer in the hangar, as there was half-formed in my mind a plan that would necessitate more intimate knowledge of the room in the event that I found it necessary or feasible to carry out my designs.

In pretended admiration of the ship, I walked all around it, viewing it from every angle; and at the same time viewing the hangar from every angle. My particular attention was riveted upon the great doorway through which the ship was to eventually pass out of the building. I saw how the doors were constructed and how they were secured; and when I had done that, I lost interest in the ship for the time being at least.

I spent the balance of the day in the shop with the mechanics, and that night found me again in the eating-place on the Avenue of Warriors.

Rapas was not there. I ordered my meal and had nearly finished it, though I was eating very slowly; and still he had not come. Still I loitered on, as I was very anxious to see him tonight.

But at last, when I had about given him up, he came.

It was evident that he was very nervous, and he appeared even more sly and furtive than ordinarily.

"Kaor!" I said, as he approached the table; "you are late tonight."

"Yes," he said; "I was detained."

He ordered his meal and fidgeted about, uneasily.

"Did you reach home last night all right?" he said.

"Why, yes, of course."

"I was a little bit worried about you," he said. "I heard that a man

was killed on the very avenue through which you must have passed."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed. "It must have happened after I had passed by."

"It is very strange," he said; "it was one of Ur Jan's assassins, and again he had the mark of John Carter upon his breast."

He was eyeing me very suspiciously, but I could see that he was afraid even to voice what was in his mind. In fact, I think it frightened him even to entertain the thought.

"Ur Jan is certain now that John Carter, himself, is in the city."

"Well," I said, "why be so upset about it? I am sure that it does not concern either you or me."

Chapter 9

ON THE BALCONY

Eyes speak the truth more often than the lips. The eyes of Rapas the Ulsio told me that he did not agree with me that the killing of one of Ur Jan's assassins was of no concern to either him or me, but his lips spoke otherwise.

"Of course," he said, "it is nothing to me; but Ur Jan is furious. He has offered an immense reward for the positive identification of the man who killed Uldak and Povak. Tonight he meets with his principal lieutenants to perfect the details of a plan which, they believe, will definitely and for all time end the activities of John Carter against the guild of assassins. They—"

He stopped suddenly, and his eyes registered a combination of suspicion and terror. It was as though for a moment his stupid mind had forgotten the suspicion that it had held that I might be John Carter and then, after exposing some of the secrets of his master, he had recalled the fact and was terrified.

"You seem to know a great deal about Ur Jan," I remarked, casually. "One would think that you are a full-fledged member of his guild."

For a moment he was confused. He cleared his throat several times as though about to speak, but evidently he could not think of anything to say, nor could his eyes hold steadily to mine. I enjoyed his discomfiture greatly.

"No," he disclaimed, presently; "it is nothing like that. These are

merely things that I have heard upon the street. They are merely gossip. It is not strange that I should repeat them to a friend."

Friend! The idea was most amusing. I knew that Rapas was now a creature of Ur Jan's and that, with his fellows, he had been commissioned to kill me; and I had been commissioned by Fal Sivas to kill Rapas; yet here we were, dining and gossiping together. It was a most amusing situation.

As our meal drew to an end, two villainous-looking fellows entered and seated themselves at a table. No sign passed between them and Rapas, but I recognized them both and knew why they were there. I had seen them both at the meeting of the assassins, and I seldom forget a face. Their presence was a compliment to me and an admission that Ur Jan realized that it would take more than one swordsman to account for me.

I should have been glad to put my mark upon their breasts, but I knew that if I killed them, the suspicion that Ur Jan harbored that I might be John Carter would be definitely confirmed. The killing of Uldak and Povak and the marking of their breasts with the sign of the Warlord might have been a coincidence; but if two more men, sent to destroy me, met a similar fate, no doubt could remain even in a stupid mind but that all four had come to their end at the hands of John Carter himself.

The men had but scarcely seated themselves when I arose. "I must be getting along, Rapas," I said; "I have some important work to do tonight. I hope you will forgive me for running off like this, but perhaps I shall see you again tomorrow night."

He tried to detain me. "Don't hurry away," he exclaimed; "wait just a few moments. There are a number of things I should like to talk to you about."

"They will have to wait until tomorrow," I told him. "May you sleep well, Rapas," and with that I turned and left the building.

I went only a short distance along the avenue in the opposite direction to that which led toward the house of Fal Sivas. I concealed myself in the shadows of a doorway then and waited, nor had I long to wait before the two assassins emerged and hurried off in the direction in which they supposed I had gone. A moment or two later Rapas came out of the building. He hesitated momentarily and then he started walking slowly in the direction taken by the

assassins.

When all three were out of sight, I came from my hiding-place and went at once to the building on the top of which my flier was stored.

The proprietor was puttering around one of the hangars when I came onto the roof. I could have wished him elsewhere, as I did not particularly care to have my comings and goings known.

"I don't see much of you," he said.

"No," I replied; "I have been very busy." I continued in the direction of the hangar where my ship was stored.

"Going to take your flier out tonight?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Watch out for the patrol boats," he said, "if you are on any business you wouldn't want the authorities to know about. They have been awfully busy the last couple of nights."

I didn't know whether he was just giving me a friendly tip, or if he were trying to get some information from me. There are many organizations, including the government, that employ secret agents. For aught I knew, the fellow might be a member of the assassins' guild.

"Well," I said, "I hope the police don't follow me tonight." He pricked up his ears. "I don't need any help; and, incidentally, she is extremely good-looking."

I winked at him and nudged him with my elbow as I passed, in a fashion that I thought his low mentality would grasp. And it did.

He laughed and slapped me on the back. "I guess you're worried more about her father than you are the police," he said.

"Say," he called after me, as I was climbing to the deck of my flier, "ain't she got a sister?"

As I slipped silently out over the city, I heard the hangar man laughing at his own witticism; and I knew that if he had had any suspicions I had lulled them.

It was quite dark, neither moon being in the heavens; but this very fact would make me all the more noticeable to patrol boats above me when I was passing over the more brilliantly lighted portions of the city, and so I quickly sought dark avenues and flew

low among the dense shadows of the buildings.

It was a matter of only a few minutes before I reached my destination and dropped my flier gently to the roof of the building that housed the headquarters of the assassins' guild of Zodanga.

Rapas' statement that Ur Jan and his lieutenants were perfecting a plan aimed at my activities against them was the magnet that had lured me here this night.

I had decided that I would not again attempt to use the anteroom off their meeting-place, as not only was the way to it fraught with too much danger but even were I to safely reach the shadowed niche behind the cupboard, I still would be unable to hear anything of their proceedings through the closed door.

I had another plan, and this I put into immediate execution.

I brought my flier to rest at the edge of the roof directly above the room in which the assassins met; then I made a rope fast to one of the rings in her gunwale.

Lying on my belly, I looked over the edge of the roof to make sure of my position and found that I had gauged it to a nicety. Directly below me was the edge of a balcony before a lighted window. My rope hung slightly to one side of the window where it was not visible to those within the room.

Carefully I set the controls of my ship and then tied the end of a light cord to the starting lever. These matters attended to, I grasped the rope and slipped over the eaves of the roof, carrying the light cord in one hand.

I descended quietly, as I had left my weapons on my flier lest they clank against one another or scrape against the side of the building as I descended and thus attract attention to me.

Very cautiously I descended; and when I had come opposite the window, I found that I could reach out with one hand and grasp the rail of the balcony. I drew myself slowly to it and into a position where I could stand securely.

Shortly after I had dropped below the edge of the roof, I had heard voices; and now that I was close to the window, I was delighted to discover that it was open and that I could hear quite well nearly all that was going on within the room. I recognized Ur Jan's voice. He was speaking as I drew myself to the balcony.

"Even if we get him tonight," he said, "and he is the man I think he is, we can still collect ransom from the girl's father or grandfather."

"And it should be a fat ransom," said another voice.

"All that a great ship will carry," replied Ur Jan, "and with it a promise of immunity for all the assassins of Zodanga and their promise that they will not persecute us further."

I could not but wonder whom they were plotting against now—probably some wealthy noble; but what connection there was between my death and the kidnaping of the girl, I could not fathom, unless, perhaps, they were not speaking of me at all but of another.

At this point, I heard a rapping sound and Ur Jan's voice saying, "Come in."

I heard a door open and the sound of men entering the room.

"Ah," exclaimed Ur Jan, clapping his hands together, "you got him tonight! Two of you were too many for him, eh?"

"We did not get him," replied a surly voice.

"What?" demanded Ur Jan. "Did he not come to the eating-place tonight?"

"He was there all right," said another voice, which I recognized instantly as that of Rapas. "I had him there, as I promised."

"Well, why didn't you get him?" demanded Ur Jan angrily.

"When he left the eating-place," explained one of the other men, "we followed him immediately; but he had disappeared when we reached the avenue. He was nowhere in sight; and though we walked rapidly all the way to the house of Fal Sivas, we saw nothing of him."

"Was he suspicious?" asked Ur Jan. "Do you think that he guessed that you had come there for him?"

"No, I am sure he did not. He did not seem to notice us at all. I did not even see him look at us."

"I cannot understand how he disappeared so quickly," said Rapas, "but we can get him tomorrow night. He has promised to meet me there then."

"Listen," said Ur Jan; "you must not fail me tomorrow. I am sure that this man is John Carter. After all, though, I am glad that we

did not kill him. I have just thought of a better plan. I will send four of you tomorrow night to wait near the house of Fal Sivas. I want you to take John Carter alive and bring him to me. With him alive, we can collect two shiploads of treasure for his princess."

"And then we will have to hide in the pits of Zodanga all the rest of our lives," demurred one of the assassins.

Ur Jan laughed. "After we collect the ransom, John Carter will never bother us again," he said.

"You mean—?"

"I am an assassin, am I not?" demanded Ur Jan. "Do you think that an assassin will let a dangerous enemy live?"

Now I understood the connection between my death and the abduction of the girl they had mentioned. She was none other than my divine princess, Dejah Thoris.

From Mors Kajak, Tardos Mors, and myself, the scoundrels expected to collect two shiploads of ransom; and they well knew, and I knew, that they had not figured amiss. We three would gladly have exchanged many shiploads of treasure for the safety of the incomparable Princess of Helium.

I realized now that I must return immediately to Helium and insure the safety of my princess, but I lingered there on the balcony a moment longer listening to the plans of the conspirators.

"But," objected one of Ur Jan's lieutenants, "even if you succeed in getting Dejah Thoris—"

"There is no 'even' about it," snapped Ur Jan. "It is already as good as accomplished. I have been preparing for this for a long time. I have done it very secretly so that there would be no leak; but now that we are ready to strike, it makes no difference. I can tell you that two of my men are guards in the palace of the princess, Dejah Thoris."

"Well, granted that you can get her," objected the former speaker skeptically, "where can you hide her? Where, upon all Barsoom, can you hide the Princess of Helium from the great Tardos Mors, even if you are successful in putting John Carter out of the way?"

"I shall not hide her on Barsoom," replied Ur Jan.

"What, not upon Barsoom? Where, then?"

"Thuria," replied Ur Jan.

"Thuria!" The speaker laughed. "You will hide her on the nearer moon. That is good, Ur Jan. That would be a splendid hiding-place —if you could get her there."

"I can get her there all right. I am not acquainted with Gar Nal for nothing."

"Oh, you mean that fool ship he is working on? The one in which he expects to go visiting around among the planets? You don't think that thing will work, even after he gets it finished, do you—if he ever does get it finished?"

"It is finished," replied Ur Jan, "and it will fly to Thuria."

"Well, even if it will, we do not know how to run it."

"Gar Nal will run it for us. He needs a vast amount of treasure to complete other boats, and for a share of the ransom he has agreed to pilot the ship for us."

Now, indeed, I realized all too well how carefully Ur Jan had made his plans and how great was the danger to my princess. Any day now they might succeed in abducting Dejah Thoris, and I knew that it would not be impossible with two traitors in her guard.

I decided that I could not waste another moment. I must leave for Helium at once, and then Fate intervened and nearly made an end of me.

As I started to climb the rope and swung away from the balcony, a part of my harness caught upon one of its iron ornaments; and when I attempted to disengage it, the thing broke loose and fell upon the balcony.

"What was that?" I heard Ur Jan's voice demand, and then I heard footsteps coming toward the window. They came fast, and an instant later the figure of Ur Jan loomed before me "A spy," he yelled, and leaped onto the balcony.

Chapter 10

JAT OR

Were I prone to seek excuses outside of myself to explain the causes of misfortunes which overtake me, I might, at that moment, have inquired why Fate should throw her weight in favor of evildoers and against me. My cause was, unquestionably, a cause of righteousness, yet the trifling fact that an iron ornament upon a balcony in the city of Zodanga had been loose and that my harness had accidently caught upon it had placed me in a situation from which it seemed likely that I could not escape with my life.

However, I was not dead yet; and I had no intention of resigning myself to the dictates of an unkind and unjust Fate without a struggle. Furthermore, in the idiom of a famous American game, I had an ace in the hole.

As Ur Jan clambered out onto the balcony, I had swung away from it, clinging to the rope attached to my flier above; and, at the same time, I started to climb.

Like a pendulum, I swung; and, having reached the end of my arc, I swung back again, seemingly directly into the arms of Ur Jan.

It all happened very quickly, much more quickly than I can tell it. Ur Jan laid hold of the hilt of his sword; I drew my knees well up against my body; I swung toward him; then, as I was almost upon him, I kicked him with both feet full in the chest and with all my strength.

Ur Jan staggered back against another of the assassins who was

following him onto the balcony, and they both went down in a heap.

Simultaneously, I pulled on the light cord that I had attached to the starting lever of my motor. In response, the ship rose; and I rose with it, dangling at the end of my rope.

My situation was anything but an enviable one. I could not, of course, guide the ship; and if it failed to rise rapidly enough, I stood an excellent chance of being dashed to death against some building as I was dragged across the city; but even this menace was by no means the greatest which threatened me, for now I heard a shot, and a bullet whirred past me—the assassins were attempting to shoot me down.

I climbed as rapidly as I could toward my flier; but climbing a small rope, while swinging beneath a rising airship, is not an enviable situation, even without the added hazard of being fired at by a band of assassins.

The ship carried me diagonally across the avenue upon which stood the building that harbored Ur Jan's band. I thought surely that I must hit the eaves of the opposite building; and, believe me, I put every ounce of my strength and agility into climbing that rope, as I swung rapidly across the avenue.

In this instance, however, Fate favored me; and I skimmed just above the roof of the building.

The assassins were still firing at me, but I imagine that most of their hits in the past had been scored with daggers of poison, for their pistol practice was execrable.

At last my fingers closed over the gunwale of my ship, and a moment later I had drawn myself to her deck. Reaching for her controls, I opened the throttle wide and set her nose for Helium.

Perhaps I was reckless, for I ignored the threat of the patrol boats and made no effort to escape their vigilance. Nothing mattered to me now but to reach Helium in time to safeguard my princess.

How well my enemies knew where to strike at me! How well they knew my vulnerable parts! They knew that nothing I possessed, including my life, would I refuse to give for the preservation of Dejah Thoris. They must have known, too, the price that they would have to pay if harm befell her; and this fact marked them for the desperate men that they were. I had threatened their security

and their lives, and they were risking all in this attempt to defeat me.

I wondered if any of them had recognized me. I had not seen Rapas at the window; and, in the darkness of the night, there seemed little likelihood that the other two assassins, who had seen me but momentarily in the eating-place, could have been sure that it was I whom they saw for a second dangling at the end of a twirling rope. I felt that they might have suspected that it was Vandor, but I hoped that they were not sure that it was John Carter.

My swift craft moved rapidly across the city of Zodanga; and I thought that I was going to get away without difficulty, when suddenly I heard the warning wail of a patrol boat, signalling me to stop.

It was considerably above me, and slightly ahead and to the starboard, when it discovered me. My throttle was open wide, and I was racing through the thin air of the dying planet at full speed.

The patrol boat must have realized instantly that I had no intention of stopping, for it shot forward in a burst of speed, at the same time diving for me. Its velocity in that long dive was tremendous; and though it was, normally, not as fast a craft as mine, its terrific speed in the dive was far greater than my craft could attain.

I was already too low to gain speed by diving, nor could I thus have equalled the great speed of the larger craft, the weight of which added to its momentum.

It was coming right down on top of me and overhauling me rapidly— coming diagonally from my starboard side.

It seemed futile to hope that I could escape it; and when it opened up on me with its bow guns, I almost had it in my mind to give up the fight and surrender, for at least then I should be alive. Otherwise, I should be dead; and dead I could be of no help to Dejah Thoris. But I was faced then with the fact that I would be delayed, that I might not be able to reach Helium in time. I was sure to be arrested, and almost certainly I would be imprisoned for attempting to escape the patrol boat. I had no papers, and that would make it all the harder for me. I stood an excellent chance of being thrown into slavery, or into the pits beneath the city to await the coming games.

The risk was too great. I must reach Helium without delay.

Suddenly I swung my helm to starboard; and, so quickly the little craft obeyed my will, I came very near to being catapulted from her deck as she swung suddenly into the new course.

I tacked directly beneath the hull of the patrol boat as she hurtled close above me; and thus she could not fire upon me, as her guns were masked by her own hull.

Now it was that her greater weight and the speed of her dive worked to my advantage. They could not check the velocity of this larger ship and turn her onto the new course with the same facility with which I had maneuvered my lighter one-man craft.

The result was that before she was on my trail again, I had passed far beyond the outer walls of Zodanga; and, running as I was without lights, the patrol boat could not pick me up.

I saw her own lights for a few moments, but I could tell that she was not upon the right course; and then, with a sigh of relief, I settled myself for the long journey to Helium.

As I sped through the thin air of dying Mars, Thuria rose above the Western horizon ahead, flooding with her brilliant light the vast expanse of dead sea bottoms where once rolled mighty oceans bearing on their bosoms the great ships of the glorious race that then dominated the young planet.

I passed their ruined cities upon the verges of these ancient seas; and in my imagination I peopled them with happy, carefree throngs. There again were the great jeddaks who ruled them and the warrior clans that defended them. Now all were gone, and doubtless the dark recesses of their stately buildings housed some wild tribe of cruel and mirthless green men.

And so I sped across the vast expanse of waste land toward The Twin Cities of Helium and the woman I loved—the woman whose deathless beauty was the toast of a world.

I had set my destination compass on my goal, and now I stretched myself upon the deck of my flier and slept.

It is a long and lonely journey from Zodanga to Helium, and this time it seemed stretched to interminable length because of my anxiety for the safety of my princess, but at last it was ended, and I saw the scarlet tower of greater Helium looming before me.

As I approached the city, a patrol boat stopped me and ordered me alongside.

During the day, I had removed the red pigment from my skin; and even before I gave my name, the officer in command of the patrol boat recognized me.

I thought I noticed some restraint and embarrassment in his manner, but he said nothing other than to greet me respectfully and ask if his ship might escort me to my palace.

I thanked him and asked him to follow me so that I would not be detained by other patrol boats; and when I was safely above my own hangars, he dipped his bow and left.

As I alighted on the roof, the hangar guard ran forward to take the ship and run her into her hangar.

These men were old and loyal retainers who had been in my service for years.

Ordinarily, they greeted me with enthusiasm when I returned from an absence, their manner toward me, while always respectful, being more that of old servants than strictly military retainers; but tonight they greeted me with averted eyes and seemed ill at ease.

I did not question them, though I felt intuitively that something was amiss.

Instead, I hastened down the ramp into my palace and made my way immediately toward the quarters of my princess.

As I approached them, I met a young officer of her personal guard; and when he saw me he came rapidly to meet me. His face looked lined and careworn, and I could see that he was laboring under suppressed emotions.

"What is wrong, Jat Or?" I demanded; "first the commander of the patrol boat, then the hangar guard, and now you all look as though you had lost your last friend."

"We have lost our best friend," he replied.

I knew what he meant, but I hesitated to demand a direct explanation. I did not want to hear it. I shrank from hearing the words that I knew he would speak, as I had never shrunk from anything before in my life, not even a rendezvous with death.

But Jat Or was a soldier, and so was I; and however painful a duty may be, a soldier must face it bravely.

"When did they take her?" I asked.

He looked at me in wide-eyed astonishment. "You know, sir?" he exclaimed.

I nodded. "It is what I hastened from Zodanga to prevent; and now, Jat Or, I am too late; am I not?"

He nodded.

"Tell me about it," I said.

"It happened last night, my prince—just when, we do not know. Two men were on guard before her door. They were new men, but they had successfully passed the same careful examination and investigation that all must who enter your service, sir. This morning when two female slaves came to relieve the two that were on duty with the princess last night, they found her gone. The two slave women lay dead in their sleeping silks and furs; they had been killed in their sleep. The two guards were gone. We do not know; but we believe, of course, that it was they who took the princess."

"It was," I said. "They were agents of Ur Jan, the assassin of Zodanga. What has been done?"

"Tardos Mors, the jeddak, her grandfather, and Mors Kajak, her father, have dispatched a thousand ships in search of her."

"It is strange," I said; "I saw not a single ship on my entire flight from Zodanga."

"But they were sent out, my prince," insisted Jat Or. "I know because I begged to be permitted to accompany one of them; I felt that the responsibility was mine, that in some way it was my fault that my princess was taken."

"Wherever they are searching, they are wasting their time," I said. "Carry that word from me to Tardos Mors. Tell him to call back his ships. There is only one ship that can follow where they have taken Dejah Thoris, and only two men in the world who can operate that ship. One of them is an enemy; the other is myself. Therefore, I must return to Zodanga at once. There is no time to be lost; otherwise, I would see the Jeddak myself before I leave."

"But is there nothing that we can do here?" he demanded. "Is there nothing that I can do? If I had been more watchful, this would not have happened. I should have slept always before the door of my princess. Let me go with you. I have a good sword; and there

may come a time when even the Warlord, himself, would be glad of another to back up his own."

I considered his appeal for a moment. Why not take him? I have been on my own so much during my long life that I have come to rely only upon my own powers, yet on the occasions when I have fought with good men at my side, I have been glad that they were there—such men as Carthoris, Kantos Kan, and Tars Tarkas. This young padwar I knew to be clever with the sword; and I knew, too, that he was loyal to my princess and myself. At least, he would be no hindrance, even if he were no help.

"Very well, Jat Or," I said. "Change into a plain harness. You are no longer a padwar in the navy of Helium; you are a panthan without a country, at the service of any who will take you. Ask the Officer of the Guard to come to my quarters at once; and when you have changed, come there also. Do not be long."

The Officer of the Guard reached my quarters shortly after I did. I told him that I was going in search of Dejah Thoris and that he would be in charge of the household until I returned.

"While I am waiting for Jat Or," I said, "I wish that you would go to the landing deck and signal for a patrol boat. I want it to escort me beyond the walls of the city, so that I shall not be delayed."

He saluted and left, and after he had gone I wrote a short note to Tardos Mors and others to Mors Kajak and Carthoris.

As I completed the last of these, Jat Or entered. He was a trim and efficient-looking fighting man, and I was pleased with his appearance. Although he had been in our service for some time I had not known him intimately in the past, as he was only a minor padwar attached to the retinue of Dejah Thoris. A padwar, incidentally, holds a rank corresponding closely to that of lieutenant in an earthly military organization.

I motioned Jat Or to follow me, and together we went to the landing deck. Here I selected a fast two-man flier; and as I was running it out of its hangar, the patrol boat that the Officer of the Guard had summoned settled toward the deck.

A moment later we were moving toward the outer walls of greater Helium under escort of the patrol boat; and when we had passed beyond, we dipped our bows to one another in parting salute. I set the nose of my flier in the direction of Zodanga and

opened the throttle wide, while the patrol boat turned back over the city.

The return journey to Zodanga was uneventful. I took advantage of the time at my disposal to acquaint Jat Or with all that had occurred while I was in Zodanga and of all that I had learned there, so that he might be well prepared in advance for any emergency which might arise. I also again tinted my flesh with the red pigment which was my only disguise.

Naturally, I was much concerned regarding the fate of Dejah Thoris, and devoted much time to useless conjecture as to where her abductors had taken her.

I could not believe that Gar Nal's interplanetary ship could have approached Helium without being discovered. It seemed, therefore, far more reasonable to assume that Dejah Thoris had been taken to Zodanga and that from that city the attempt would be made to transport her to Thuria.

My state of mind during this long journey is indescribable. I visualized my princess in the power of Ur Jan's ruffians; and I pictured her mental suffering, though I knew that outwardly she would remain calm and courageous. To what insults and indignities would they subject her? A blood-red mist swam before my eyes as thoughts like these raced through my brain, and the blood-lust of the killer dominated me completely, so that I am afraid I was a rather surly and uncommunicative companion that Jat Or sailed with during the last hours of that flight.

But at last we approached Zodanga. It was night again.

It might have been safer to have waited until daylight, as I had on a previous occasion, before entering the city; but time was an all important factor now.

Showing no lights, we nosed slowly toward the city's walls; and keeping constant watch for a patrol boat, we edged over the outer wall and into a dark avenue beyond.

Keeping to unlighted thoroughfares, we came at last in safety to the same public hangar that I had patronized before.

The first step in the search for Dejah Thoris had been taken.

Chapter 11

IN THE HOUSE OF GAR NAL

Ignorance and stupidity occasionally reveal advantages that raise them to the dignity of virtues. The ignorant and stupid are seldom sufficiently imaginative to be intelligently curious.

The hangar man had seen me depart in a one-man flier and alone. Now he saw me return in a two-man flier, with a companion. Yet, he evidenced no embarrassing curiosity on the subject.

Storing our craft in a hangar and instructing the hangar man that he was to permit either one of us to take it out when we chose, I conducted Jat Or to the public house in the same building; and after introducing him to the proprietor, I left him, as the investigation that I now purposed conducting could be carried on to better advantage by one man than two.

My first objective was to learn if Gar Nal's ship had left Zodanga.

Unfortunately, I did not know the location of the hangar in which Gar Nal had built. his ship. I was quite sure that I could not get this information from Rapas, as he was already suspicious of me, and so my only hope lay in Fal Sivas.

I was quite sure that he must know, as from remarks that he had dropped, I was convinced that the two inventors had constantly spied upon one another; and so I set out in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas, after instructing Jat Or to remain at the public house where I could find him without delay should I require his services.

It was still not very late in the evening when I reached the house of the old inventor. At my signal, Hamas admitted me. He appeared a little surprised and not overly pleased when he recognized me.

"We thought that Ur Jan had finally done away with you," he said.

"No such luck, Hamas," I replied. "Where is Fal Sivas?"

"He is in his laboratory on the level above," replied the major-domo. "I do not know that he will want to be disturbed, though I believe that he will be anxious to see you."

He added this last with a nasty inflection that I did not like.

"I will go up to his quarters, at once," I said.

"No," said Hamas; "you will wait here. I will go to the master and ask his pleasure."

I brushed past him into the corridor. "You may come with me, if you will, Hamas," I said; "but whether you come or not, I must see Fal Sivas at once."

He grumbled at this disregard of his authority and hastened along the corridor a pace or two ahead of me.

As I passed my former quarters, I noticed that the door was open; but though I saw nothing of Zanda within, I gave the matter no thought.

We passed on up the ramp to the level above, and there Hamas, knocked on the door of Fal Sivas's apartment.

For a moment there was no answer; and I was about to enter the room when I heard Fal Sivas's voice demand querulously, "Who's there?"

"It is Hamas," replied the major-domo, "and the man, Vandor, who has returned."

"Send him in, send him in," directed Fal Sivas.

As Hamas opened the door, I brushed past him and, turning, pushed him out into the corridor. "He said, 'Send him in,'" I said. Then I closed the door in his face.

Fal Sivas had evidently come out of one of the other rooms of his suite in answer to our knock, for he stood now facing me with his hand still on the latch of a door in the opposite wall of the room, an angry frown contracting his brows.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

Naturally, I have not been accustomed to being spoken to in the manner that Fal Sivas had adopted; and I did not relish it. I am a fighting man, not an actor; and, for a moment, I had a little difficulty in remembering that I was playing a part.

I did even go so far as to take a couple of steps toward Fal Sivas with the intention of taking him by the scruff of the neck and shaking some manners into him, but I caught myself in time; and as I paused, I could not but smile.

"Why don't you answer me?" cried Fal Sivas, "You are laughing; do you dare to laugh at me?"

"Why shouldn't I laugh at my own stupidity?" I demanded.

"Your own stupidity? I do not understand. What do you mean?"

"I took you for an intelligent man, Fal Sivas; and now I find that I was mistaken. It makes me smile."

I thought he was going to explode, but he managed to control himself. "Just what do you mean by that?" he demanded angrily.

"I mean that no intelligent man would speak to a lieutenant in the tone of voice in which you have just addressed me, no matter what he suspected, until he had thoroughly investigated. You have probably been listening to Hamas during my absence; so I am naturally condemned without a hearing."

He blinked at me for a moment and then said in a slightly more civil voice, "Well, go ahead, explain where you have been and what you have been doing."

"I have been investigating some of Ur Jan's activities," I replied, "but I have no time now to go into an explanation of that. The important thing for me to do now is to go to Gar Nal's hangar, and I do not know where it is. I have come here to you for that information."

"Why do you want to go to Gar Nal's hangar?" he demanded.

"Because I have word that Gar Nal's ship has left Zodanga on a mission in which both he And Ur Jan are connected."

This information threw Fal Sivas into a state of excitement bordering on apoplexy. "The calot!" he exclaimed, "the thief, the scoundrel; he has stolen all my ideas and now he has launched his ship ahead of mine."

"Calm yourself, Fal Sivas," I urged him. "We do not know yet that Gar Nal's ship has sailed. Tell me where he was building it, and I will go and investigate."

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "at once; but Vandor, do you know where Gar Nal was going? Did you find that out?"

"To Thuria, I believe," I replied.

Now, indeed, was Fal Sivas convulsed with rage. By comparison with this, his first outburst appeared almost like enthusiastic approval of his competitor for inventive laurels. He called Gar Nal every foul thing he could lay his tongue to and all his ancestors back to the original tree of life from which all animate things on Mars are supposed to have sprung.

"He is going to Thuria after the treasure!" he screamed in conclusion. "He has even stolen that idea from me."

"This is no time for lamentation, Fal Sivas," I snapped. "We are getting no place. Tell me where Gar Nal's hangar is, so that we may know definitely whether or not he has sailed."

With an effort, he gained control of himself; and then he gave me minute directions for finding Gar Nal's hangar, and even told me how I might gain entrance to it, revealing a familiarity with his enemy's stronghold which indicated that his own spies had not been idle.

As Fal Sivas concluded his directions, I thought that I heard sounds coming from the room behind him—muffled sounds—a gasp, a sob, perhaps. I could not tell.

The sounds were faint; they might have been almost anything; and now Fal Sivas crossed the room toward me and ushered me out into the corridor, a little hurriedly, I thought; but that may have been my imagination. I wondered if he, too, had heard the sounds.

"You had better go, now," he said; "and when you have discovered the truth, return at once and report to me."

On my way from the quarters of Fal Sivas, I stopped at my own to speak to Zanda; but she was not there, and I continued on to the little doorway through which I came and went from the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas was there in the anteroom. He looked disappointed when he saw me. "You are going out?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Are you returning again tonight?"

"I expect to," I replied; "and by the way, Hamas, where is Zanda? She was not in my quarters when I stopped in."

"We thought you were not returning," explained the major-domo, "and Fal Sivas found other duties for Zanda. Tomorrow I shall have Phystal give you another slave."

"I want Zanda again," I said. "She performs her duties satisfactorily, and I prefer her."

"That is something you will have to discuss with Fal Sivas," he replied.

I passed out then into the night and gave the matter no further thought, my mind being occupied with far more important considerations.

My way led past the public house where I had left Jat Or and on into another quarter of the city. Here, without difficulty, I located the building that Fal Sivas had described.

At one side of it was a dark narrow alley. I entered this and groped my way to the far end, where I found a low wall, as Fal Sivas had explained that I would.

I paused there a moment and listened intently, but no sound came from the interior of the building. Then I vaulted easily to the top of the wall, and from there to the roof of a low annex. Across this roof appeared the end of the hangar in which Gar Nal had built his ship. I recognized it for what it was by the great doors set in the wall.

Fal Sivas had told me that through the crack between the two doors, I could see the interior of the hangar and quickly determine if the ship were still there.

But there was no light within; the hangar was completely dark, and I could see nothing as I glued an eye to the crack.

I attempted to move the doors, but they were securely locked. Then I moved cautiously along the wall in search of another opening.

About forty feet to the right of the doors, I discovered a small window some ten feet above the roof upon which I was standing. I sprang up to it and grasped the sill with my fingers and drew myself

up in the hope that I might be able to see something from this vantage point.

To my surprise and delight, I found the window open. All was quiet inside the hangar—quiet and as dark as Erebus.

Sitting on the sill, I swung my legs through the window, turned over on my belly, and lowered myself into the interior of the hangar; then I let go of the sill and dropped.

Such a maneuver, naturally, is fraught with danger, as one never knows upon what he may alight.

I alighted upon a moveable bench, loaded with metal parts and tools. My weight upset it, and it crashed to the floor with a terrific din.

Scrambling to my feet, I stood there in the darkness waiting, listening. If there were anyone anywhere in the building, large as it appeared to be, it seemed unlikely that the racket I had made could pass unnoticed, nor did it.

Presently I heard footsteps. They seemed at a considerable distance, but they approached rapidly at first and then more slowly. Whoever was coming appeared to grow more cautious as he neared the hangar.

Presently a door at the far end was thrown open, and I saw two armed men silhouetted against the light of the room beyond.

It was not a very brilliant light that came from the adjoining chamber, but it was sufficient to partially dispel the gloom of the cavernous interior of the hangar and reveal the fact that there was no ship here. Gar Nal had sailed!

I had evidently been hoping against hope, for the discovery stunned me. Gar Nal was gone; and, unquestionably, Dejah Thoris was with him.

The two men were advancing cautiously into the hangar. "Do you see anyone?" I heard the man in the rear demand.

"No," replied the leader, and then, in a loud voice, "who is here?"

The floor of the hangar had a most untidy appearance. Barrels, crates, carboys, tools, parts—a thousand and one things—were scattered indiscriminately about it. Perhaps this was fortunate for me; as, among so many things, it would be difficult to discover me as long as I did not move, unless the men stumbled directly upon

me.

I was kneeling in the shadow of a large box, planning upon my next move in the event that I was discovered.

The two men came slowly along the center of the room. They came opposite my hiding-place. They passed me. I glanced at the open door through which they had come. There seemed to be no one there. Evidently these two men had been on guard; and they, alone, had heard the noise that I had made.

Suddenly a plan flashed to my mind. I stepped out of my hiding-place and stood between them and the open door through which they had entered.

I had moved quietly, and they had not heard me. Then I spoke.

"Do not move," I said, "and you will be safe."

They stopped as though they had been shot, and wheeled about.

"Stand where you are," I commanded.

"Who are you?" asked one of the men.

"Never mind who I am. Answer my questions, and no harm will befall you."

Suddenly one of the men laughed. "No harm will befall us," he said. "You are alone, and we are two. Come!" he whispered to his companion; and drawing their swords, the two rushed upon me.

I backed away from them, my own sword ready to parry their thrusts and cuts.

"Wait!" I cried. "I do not want to kill you. Listen to me. I only want some information from you, and then I will go."

"Oh, ho! He does not want to kill us," shouted one of the men. "Come now," he directed his fellow, "get on his left side, and I will take him on the right. So he does not want to kill us, eh?"

Sometimes I feel that I am entitled to very little credit for my countless successes in mortal combat. Always, it seems to me, and it certainly must appear even more so to my opponents, my flashing blade is a living thing inspired to its marvellous feats by a power beyond that of mortal man. It was so tonight.

As the two men charged me from opposite sides, my steel flashed so rapidly in parries, cuts, and thrusts that I am confident that the eyes of my opponents could not follow it.

The first man went down with a cloven skull the instant that he came within reach of my blade, and almost in the same second I ran his companion through the shoulder. Then I stepped back.

His sword arm was useless; it hung limp at his side. He could not escape. I was between him and the door; and he stood there, waiting for me to run him through the heart.

"I have no desire to kill you," I told him. "Answer my questions truthfully, and I will let you live."

"Who are you, and what do you want to know?" he growled.

"Never mind who I am. Answer my questions, and see that you answer them truthfully. When did Gar Nal's ship sail?"

"Two nights ago."

"Who was on board?"

"Gar Nal and Ur Jan."

"No one else?" I demanded.

"No," he replied.

"Where were they going?"

"How should I know?"

"It will be well for you, if you do know. Come now, where were they going; and who were they taking with them?"

"They were going to meet another ship somewhere near Helium, and there they were going to take aboard someone whose name I never heard mentioned."

"Were they kidnaping someone for ransom?" I demanded.

He nodded. "I guess that was it," he said.

"And you don't know who it was?"

"No."

"Where are they going to hide this person they are kidnaping?"

"Some place where no one will ever find her," he said.

"Where is that?"

"I heard Gar Nal say he was going to Thuria."

I had gained about all the information that this man could give me that would be of any value; so I made him lead me to a small door that opened onto the roof from which I had gained entrance to

the hangar. I stepped out and waited until he had closed the door; then I crossed the roof and dropped to the top of the wall below, and from there into the alleyway.

As I made my way toward the house of Fal Sivas, I planned rapidly. I realized that I must take desperate chances, and that whatever the outcome of my adventure, its success or failure rested wholly upon my own shoulders.

I stopped at the public house where I had left Jat Or, and found him anxiously awaiting my return.

The place was now so filled with guests that we could not talk with privacy, and so I took him with me over to the eating-place that Rapas and I had frequented.

Here we found a table, and I narrated to him all that had occurred since I had left him after our arrival in Zodanga.

"And now," I said, "tonight I hope that we may start for Thuria. When we separate here, go at once to the hangar and take out the flier. Keep an eye out for patrol boats; and if you succeed in leaving the city, go directly west on the thirtieth parallel for one hundred haads. Wait for me there. If I do not come in two days, you are free to act as you wish."

Chapter 12

"WE BOTH MUST DIE!"

Thuria! She had always intrigued my imagination; and now as I saw her swinging low through the sky above me, as Jat Or and I separated on the avenue in front of the eating-place, she dominated my entire being.

Somewhere between that blazing orb and Mars, a strange ship was bearing my lost love to some unknown fate.

How hopeless her situation must appear to her, who could not guess that any who loved her were even vaguely aware of her situation or whither her abductors were taking her. It was quite possible that she, herself, did not know. How I wished that I might transmit a message of hope to her.

With such thoughts was my mind occupied as I made my way in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas; but even though I was thus engrossed, my faculties, habituated to long years of danger, were fully alert, so that sounds of footsteps emerging from an avenue I had just crossed did not pass unnoticed.

Presently, I was aware that they had turned into the avenue that I was traversing and were following behind me, but I gave no outward indication that I heard them until it became evident that they were rapidly overtaking me.

I swung around then, my hand upon the hilt of my sword; and as I did so, the man who was following addressed me.

"I thought it was you," he said, "but I was not certain."

"It is I, Rapas," I replied.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "I have been looking for you for the past two days."

"Yes?" I inquired. "What do you want of me? You will have to be quick, Rapas; I am in a hurry."

He hesitated. I could see that he was nervous. He acted as though he had something to say, but did not know how to begin, or else was afraid to broach the subject.

"Well, you see," he commenced, lamely, "we haven't seen each other for several days, and I just wanted to have a visit with you—just gossip a little, you know. Let's go back and have a bite to eat."

"I have just eaten," I replied.

"How is old Fal Sivas?" he asked. "Do you know anything new?"

"Not a thing," I lied. "Do you?"

"Oh, just gossip," he replied. "They say that Ur Jan has kidnaped the Princess of Helium." I could see him looking at me narrowly for my reaction.

"Is that so?" I inquired. "I should hate to be in Ur Jan's shoes when the men of Helium lay hold of him."

"They won't lay hold of him," said Rapas. "He has taken her where they will never find her."

"I hope that he gets all that is coming to him, if he harms her," I said; "and he probably will." Then I turned as though to move away.

"Ur Jan won't harm her, if the ransom is paid," said Rapas.

"Ransom?" I inquired. "And what do they consider the Princess of Helium worth to the men of Helium?"

"Ur Jan is letting them off easy," volunteered Rapas. "He is asking only two shiploads of treasure—all the gold and platinum and jewels that two great ships will carry."

"Have they notified her people of their demand?" I asked.

"A friend of mine knows a man who is acquainted with one of Ur Jan's assassins," explained Rapas; "communication with the assassins could be opened up in this way."

So he had finally gotten it out of his system. I could have laughed if I had not been so worried about Dejah Thoris. The situation was self-evident. Ur Jan and Rapas were both confident that I was either

John Carter or one of his agents, and Rapas had been delegated to act as intermediary between the kidnapers and myself.

"It is all very interesting," I said; "but, of course, it is nothing to me. I must be getting along. May you sleep well, Rapas."

I venture to say that I left The Rat in a quandary as I turned on my heel and continued on my way toward the house of Fal Sivas. I imagine that he was not so sure as he had been that I was John Carter or even that I was an agent of the Warlord; for certainly either one or the other should have evinced more interest in his information than I had.

Of course, he had told me nothing that I did not already know; and therefore there had been nothing to induce within me either surprise or excitement.

Perhaps it would have made no difference either one way or the other had Rapas known that I was John Carter; but it pleased me, in combating the activities of such men, to keep them mystified and always to know a little more than they did.

Again Hamas admitted me when I reached the gloomy pile that Fal Sivas inhabited; and as I passed him and started along the corridor toward the ramp that leads up to Fal Sivas's quarters on the next level, he followed after me.

"Where are you going?" he asked, "to your quarters?"

"No, I am going to the quarters of Fal Sivas," I replied, "He is very busy now. He cannot be disturbed," said Hamas.

"I have information for him," I said.

"It will have to wait until tomorrow morning."

I turned and looked at him. "You annoy me, Hamas," I said; "run along and mind your own business."

He was furious then, and took hold of my arm. "I am major-domo here," he cried, "and you must obey me. You are only a—a—"

"An assassin," I prompted him meaningly, and laid my hand upon the hilt of my sword.

He backed away. "You wouldn't dare," he cried. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, wouldn't I? You don't know me, Hamas. I am in the employ of Fal Sivas; and when I am in a man's employ, I obey him. He told

me to report back to him at once. If it is necessary to kill you to do so, I shall have to kill you."

His manner altered then, and I could see that he was afraid of me. "I only warned you for your own good," he said. "Fal Sivas is in his laboratory now. If he is interrupted in the work that he is doing, he will be furious—he may kill you himself. If you are wise, you will wait until he sends for you."

"Thank you, Hamas," I said; "I am going to see Fal Sivas now. May you sleep well," and I turned and continued on up the corridor toward the ramp. He did not follow me.

I went at once to the quarters of Fal Sivas, knocked once upon the door, and then opened it. Fal Sivas was not there, but I heard his voice coming from beyond the little door at the opposite end of the room.

"Who's that? What do you want? Get out of here and do not disturb me," he cried.

"It is I, Vandor," I replied. "I must see you at once."

"No, no, go away; I will see you in the morning."

"You will see me now," I said; "I am coming in there."

I was halfway across the room, when the door opened and Fal Sivas, livid with rage, stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

"You dare? You dare?" he cried.

"Gar Nal's ship is not in its hangar," I said.

That seemed to bring him to his senses, but it did not lessen his rage; it only turned it in another direction.

"The calot!" he exclaimed, "the son of a thousand million calots! He has beaten me. He will go to Thuria. With the great wealth that he will bring back, he will do all that I had hoped to do."

"Yes," I said. "Ur Jan is with him, and what such a combination as Ur Jan and a great and unscrupulous scientist could do is incalculable; but you too have a ship, Fal Sivas. It is ready. You and I could go to Thuria. They would not suspect that we were coming. We would have all the advantage. We could destroy Gar Nal and his ship, and then you would be master."

He paled. "No, no," he said, "I can't. I can't do it."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Thuria is a long way. No one knows what might happen. Perhaps something would go wrong with the ship. It might not work in practice as it should in theory. There might be strange beasts and terrible men on Thuria."

"But you built this ship to go to Thuria," I cried. "You told me so, yourself."

"It was a dream," he mumbled; "I am always dreaming, for in dreams nothing bad can happen to me; but in Thuria—oh, it is so far, so high above Barsoom. What if something happened?"

And now I understood. The man was an arrant coward. He was allowing his great dream to collapse about his ears because he did not have the courage to undertake the great adventure.

What was I to do? I had been depending upon Fal Sivas, and now he had failed me.

"I cannot understand you," I said; "with your own arguments, you convinced me that it would be a simple thing to go to Thuria in your ship. What possible danger can confront us there that we may not overcome? We shall be veritable giants on Thuria. No creature that lives there could withstand us. With the stamp of a foot, we could crush the lives from the greatest beasts that Thuria could support."

I had been giving this matter considerable thought ever since there first appeared a likelihood that I might go to Thuria. I am no scientist, and my figures may not be accurate, but they are approximately true. I knew that the diameter of Thuria was supposed to be about seven miles, so that its volume could be only about two percent of that of, let us say, the Earth, that you may have a comparison that will be more understandable to you.

I estimated that if there were human beings on Thuria and they were proportioned to their environment as man on Earth is to his, they would be but about nine-and-a-half inches tall and weigh between four and five pounds; and that an earth-man transported to Mars would be able to jump 225 feet into the air, make a standing broad jump of 450 feet and a running broad jump of 725 feet, and that a strong man could lift a mass equivalent to a weight of 4 tons on earth.

Against such a Titan, the tiny creatures of Thuria would be

helpless— provided, of course, that Thuria were inhabited.

I suggested all this to Fal Sivas, but he shook his head impatiently. "There is something that you do not know," he said. "Perhaps Gar Nal, himself, does not know it. There is a peculiar relationship between Barsoom and her moons that does not exist between any of the other planets in the solar system and their satellites. The suggestion was made by an obscure scientist thousands of years ago, and then it seemed to have been forgotten. I discovered it in an ancient manuscript that I came upon by accident. It is in the original handwriting of the investigator and may have had no distribution whatsoever.

"However, the idea intrigued me; and over a period of twenty years I sought either to prove or disprove it. Eventually, I proved it conclusively."

"And what is it?" I asked.

"There exists between Barsoom and her satellites a peculiar relation which I have called a compensatory adjustment of masses. For example, let us consider a mass travelling from Barsoom to Thuria. As it approaches the nearer moon, it varies directly as the influences of the planet and the satellite vary. The ratio of the mass to the mass of Barsoom at the surface of Barsoom, therefore, would be the same as the ratio of the mass to the mass of Thuria, at the surface of Thuria.

"You were about right in assuming that an inhabitant of Thuria, if such exists, if he were of the same proportion to Thuria as you are to Barsoom, would be about eight sofs tall; and consequently, if my theory is correct, and I have no reason to doubt it, were you to travel from Barsoom to Thuria you would be but eight sofs tall when you reached the surface of the moon."

"Preposterous!" I exclaimed.

He flushed angrily. "You are nothing but an ignorant assassin," he cried. "How dare you question the knowledge of Fal Sivas? But enough of this; return to your quarters. I must get on with my work."

"I am going to Thuria," I said; "and if you won't go with me, I shall go alone."

He had turned back to enter his little laboratory, but I had followed him and was close behind him.

"Go away from here," he said; "keep out, or I will have you killed."

Just then I heard a cry from the room behind him, and a woman's voice calling, "Vandor! Vandor, save me!"

Fal Sivas went livid and tried to dash into the room and close the door in my face, but I was too quick for him. I leaped to the door and pushed him aside as I stepped in.

A terrible sight met my eyes. On marble slabs, raised about four feet from the floor, several women were securely strapped, so that they could not move a limb or raise their heads. There were four of them. Portions of the skulls of three had been removed, but they were still conscious. I could see their frightened, horrified eyes turn toward us.

I turned upon Fal Sivas. "What is the meaning of this?" I cried. "What hellish business are you up to?"

"Get out! Get out!" he screamed. "How dare you invade the holy precincts of science? Who are you, dog, worm, to question what Fal Sivas does; to interfere with the work of a brain the magnitude of which you cannot conceive? Get out! Get out! or I will have you killed."

"And who will kill me?" I demanded. "Put these poor creatures out of their misery, and then I will attend to you."

So great was either his rage or his terror, or both, that he trembled all over like a man with the palsy; and then, before I could stop him, he turned and darted from the room.

I knew that he had gone for help; that presently I should probably have all the inmates of his hellish abode upon me.

I might have pursued him, but I was afraid that something might happen here while I was gone, and so I turned back to the girl on the fourth slab. It was Zanda.

I stepped quickly to her side. I saw that she had not yet been subjected to Fal Sivas's horrid operation, and drawing my dagger I cut the bonds that held her.

She slipped from the table and threw her arms about my neck. "Oh, Vandor, Vandor," she cried, "now we must both die. They come! I hear them."

Chapter 13

PURSUED

Heralding the approach of armed men was the clank of metal on metal. How many were coming, I did not know; but here I was with only my own sword between me and death and my back against the wall.

Zanda was without hope, but she remained cool and did not lose her head. In those few brief moments I could see that she was courageous.

"Give me your dagger, Vandor," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"They will kill you, but Fal Sivas shall not have me nor these others to torture further."

"I am not dead, yet," I reminded her.

"I shall not kill myself until you are dead; but these others, there is no hope for them. They pray for merciful death. Let me put them out of their misery."

I winced at the thought, but I knew that she was right, and I handed her my dagger. It was a thing that I should have had to have done myself. It took much more courage than facing armed men, and I was glad to be relieved of the ghastly job.

Zanda was behind me now. I could not see what she was doing, and I never asked her what she did.

Our enemies had paused in the outer room. I could hear them

whispering together.

Then Fal Sivas raised his voice and shouted to me.

"Come out of there and give yourself up," he screamed, "or we will come in and kill you."

I did not reply; I just stood there, waiting. Presently Zanda came close to me and whispered, "There is a door on the opposite side of this room, hidden behind a large screen. If you wait here, Fal Sivas will send men to that door; and they will attack you from in front and behind."

"I shall not wait, then," I said, moving toward the door leading into the outer room where I had heard my enemies whispering.

Zanda laid a hand upon my arm, "Just a moment, Vandor," she said. "You remain where you are, facing the door; and I will go to it and swing it open suddenly. Then they cannot take you by surprise, as they could if you were to open it."

The door was hinged so that it swung in, and thus Zanda would be protected as she drew it inward and stepped behind it.

Zanda stepped forward and grasped the handle while I stood directly in front of the door and a few paces from it, my long sword in my hand.

As she opened the door, a sword flashed inward in a terrific cut that would have split my skull had I been there.

The man who wielded the sword was Hamas. Just behind him, I saw Phystal and another armed man, while in the rear was Fal Sivas.

Now the old inventor commenced to scream at them and urge them on; but they held back, for only one man could pass through the doorway at a time; and none of them seemed to relish the idea of being the first. In fact, Hamas had leaped back immediately following his cut; and now his voice joined with that of Fal Sivas in exhorting the other two to enter the laboratory and destroy me.

"On, men!" cried Hamas. "We are three, and he is only one. Onward, you, Phystal! Kill the calot!"

"In with you, yourself, Hamas," growled Phystal.

"Go in! Go in and get him!" shrieked Fal Sivas. "Go in, you cowards." But no one came in; they just stood there, each urging the other to be first.

I did not relish this waste of time, and for two reasons. In the first place, I could not abide the thought of even a moment's unnecessary delay in starting out upon my quest for Dejah Thoris; and, secondly, there was always the danger that reinforcements might arrive. Therefore, if they would not come in to me, I would have to go out to them.

And I did go out to them, and so suddenly that it threw them into confusion.

Hamas and Phystal, in their efforts to avoid me, fell back upon the man behind them. He was only a slave, but he was a brave man—the bravest of the four that faced me.

He pushed Phystal and Hamas roughly aside and sprang at me with his long sword.

Fal Sivas shouted encouragement to him.

"Kill him, Wolak!" he shrieked; "kill him and you shall have your freedom."

At that, Wolak rushed me determinedly. I was fighting for my life, but he was fighting for that and something even sweeter than life; and now Hamas and Phystal were creeping in on me—like two cowardly jackals, they hovered at the edge of the fight, waiting to rush in when they might do so without endangering themselves.

"Your weight in gold, Wolak, if you kill him," screamed Fal Sivas.

Freedom and wealth! Now, indeed, did my antagonist seem inspired. Life, liberty, and riches! What a princely reward for which to strive; but I, too, was fighting for a priceless treasure, for my incomparable Dejah Thoris.

The impetuosity of the man's attack had driven me back a couple of paces, so that I now stood at the doorway, which was really a most strategic position in that it prevented either Hamas or Phystal from attacking me from the side.

Just behind me stood Zanda, spurring me on with low words of encouragement; but though I appreciated them, I did not need them. I was already set to terminate the affair as quickly as possible.

The edge of a Martian long sword is just as keen as a razor, and the point needle-like in sharpness. It is a trick to preserve this keen edge during a combat, taking the blows of your adversary's weapon

on the back of your blade; and I prided myself upon my ability to do this, saving the keen cutting edge for the purpose for which it is intended. I needed a sharp edge now, for I was preparing to execute a little trick that I had successfully used many times before.

My adversary was a good swordsman and exceptionally strong on defense; so that, in ordinary swordplay, he might have prolonged the duel for a considerable time.

For this, I had no mind. I wished to end it at once.

In preparation, I pushed him back; then I thrust at his face. He did the very thing that I knew he would do. He threw his head back, involuntarily, to avoid my point; and this brought his chin up exposing his throat. With my blade still extended, I cut quickly from right to left. The point of my sword moved but a few inches, but its keen edge opened his throat almost from ear to ear.

I shall never forget the look of horror in his eyes as he staggered back and crumpled to the floor.

Then I turned my attention to Hamas and Phystal.

Each of them wanted the other to have the honor of engaging me. As they retreated, they made futile passes at me with their points; and I was steadily pushing them into a corner when Fal Sivas took a hand in the affair.

Heretofore, he had contented himself with screaming shrill encouragement and commands to his men. Now he picked up a vase and hurled it at my head.

Just by chance, I saw it coming and dodged it; and it broke into a thousand fragments against the wall. Then he picked up something else and threw at me, and this time he hit my sword hand, and Phystal nearly got me then.

As I jumped back to avoid his thrust, Fal Sivas hurled another small object; and from the corner of my eye I saw Zanda catch it.

Neither Phystal nor Hamas was a good swordsman, and I could easily have overcome them in fair fight, but I could see that these new tactics of Fal Sivas were almost certain to prove my undoing. If I turned upon him, the others would be behind me; and how they would have taken advantage of such a God-given opportunity!

I tried to work them around so that they were between Fal Sivas and myself. In this way, they would shield me from his missiles, but

that is something easier said than done when you are fighting two men in a comparatively small room.

I was terribly handicapped by the fact that I had to watch three men; and now, as I drove Hamas back with a cut, I cast a quick glance in the direction of Fal Sivas; and as I did so, I saw a missile strike him between the eyes. He fell to the floor like a log. Zanda had hoisted him with his own petard.

I could not repress a smile as I turned my undivided attention upon Hamas and Phystal.

As I drove them into a corner, Hamas surprised me by throwing his sword aside and falling upon his knees.

"Spare me, spare me, Vandor!" he cried, "I did not want to attack you. Fal Sivas made me." And then Phystal cast his weapon to the floor; and he, too, went upon his marrow bones. It was the most revolting exhibition of cowardice that I had ever witnessed. I felt like running them through, but I did not want to foul my blade with their putrid blood.

"Kill them," counseled Zanda; "you cannot trust either of them."

I shook my head. "We cannot kill unarmed men in cold blood," I said.

"Unless you do, they will prevent our escape," she said, "even if we can escape. There are others who will stop us on the lower level."

"I have a better plan, Zanda," I said, and forthwith I bound Hamas and Phystal securely in their own harness and then did the same with Fal Sivas, for he was not dead but only stunned. I also gagged all three of them so that they could not cry out.

This done, I told Zanda to follow me and went at once to the hangar where the ship rested on her scaffolding.

"Why did you come here?" asked Zanda. "We ought to be getting out of the building as quickly as possible—you are going to take me with you, aren't you, Vandor?"

"Certainly I am," I said, "and we are going out of the building very shortly. Come, perhaps I shall need your help with these doors," and I led the way to the two great doors in the end of the hangar. They were well hung, however, and after being unlatched, slid easily to the sides of the opening.

Zanda stepped to the threshold and looked out. "We cannot escape this way," she said; "it is fifty feet to the ground, and there is no ladder or other means of descent."

"Nevertheless, we are going to escape through that doorway," I told her, amused at her mystification. "Just come with me, and you will see how."

We returned to the side of the ship, and I must say that I was far from being as assured of success as I tried to pretend, as I concentrated my thoughts upon the little metal sphere that held the mechanical brain in the nose of the craft.

I think my heart stopped beating as I waited, and then a great wave of relief surged through me as I saw the door open and the ladder lowering itself toward the floor.

Zanda looked on in wide-eyed amazement. "Who is in there?" she demanded.

"No one," I said. "Now up with you, and be quick about it. We have no time to loiter here."

She was evidently afraid, but she obeyed me like a good soldier, and I followed her up the ladder into the cabin. Then I directed the brain to hoist the ladder and close the door, as I went forward into the control room, followed by the girl.

Here I again focused my thoughts upon the mechanical brain just above my head.

Even with the demonstration that I had already had, I could not yet convince myself of the reality of what I was doing. It seemed impossible that that insensate thing could raise the craft from its scaffolding and guide it safely through the doorway, yet scarcely had I supplied that motivating thought when the ship rose a few feet and moved almost silently toward the aperture.

As we passed out into the still night, Zanda threw her arms about my neck. "Oh, Vandor, Vandor!" she cried, "you have saved me from the clutches of that horrible creature. I am free! I am free again!" she cried, hysterically. "Oh, Vandor, I am yours; I shall be your slave forever. Do with me whatever you will."

I could see that she was distraught and hysterical.

"You are excited, Zanda," I said, soothingly. "You owe me nothing. You are a free woman. You do not have to be my slave or

the slave of any other."

"I want to be your slave, Vandor," she said, and then in a very low voice, "I love you."

Gently I disengaged her arms from about my neck. "You do not know what you are saying, Zanda," I told her; "your gratitude has carried you away. You must not love me; my heart belongs to someone else, and there is another reason why you must not say that you love me—a reason that you will learn sooner or later, and then you will wish that you had been stricken dumb before you ever told me that you loved me."

I was thinking of her hatred of John Carter and her avowed desire to kill him.

"I do not know what you mean," she said; "but if you tell me not to love you, I will try to obey you, for no matter what you say, I am your slave. I owe my life to you, and I shall always be your slave."

"We will talk about that some other time," I said; "just now I have something to tell you that may make you wish that I had left you in the house of Fal Sivas."

She knitted her brows and looked at me questioningly. "Another mystery?" she asked. "Again you speak in riddles."

"We are going on a long and dangerous journey in this ship, Zanda. I am forced to take you with me because I cannot risk detection by landing you anywhere in Zodanga; and, of course, it would be signing your death warrant to set you down far beyond the walls of the city."

"I do not want to be set down in Zodanga or outside it," she replied. "Wherever you are going, I want to go with you. Some day you may need me, Vandor; and then you will be glad that I am along."

"Do you know where we are going, Zanda?" I asked.

"No," she said, "and I do not care. It would make no difference to me, even if you were going to Thuria."

I smiled at that, and turned my attention again to the mechanical brain, directing it to take us to the spot where Jat Or waited; and just then I heard the wailing signal of a patrol boat above us.

Chapter 14

ON TO THURIA

Although I had realized the likelihood of our strange craft being discovered by a patrol boat, I had hoped that we might escape from the city without detection.

I knew that if we did not obey their command they would open fire on us, and a single hit might put an end to all my plans to reach Thuria and save Dejah Thoris.

While the armament of the ship, as described to me by Fal Sivas, would have given me an overwhelming advantage in an encounter with any patrol boat, I hesitated to stand and fight, because of the chance that a lucky shot from the enemy's ship might disable us.

Fal Sivas had boasted of the high potential speed of his brain conception; and I decided that however much I might dislike to flee from an enemy, flight was the safest course to pursue.

Zanda had her face pressed to one of the numerous ports in the bull of the ship.

The wail of the patrol boat siren was now continuous—an eerie, menacing voice in the night, that pierced the air like sharp daggers.

"They are overhauling us, Vandor," said Zanda; "and they are signalling other patrol boats to their aid."

"They have probably noticed the strange lines of this craft; and not only their curiosity, but their suspicion has been aroused."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"We are going to put the speed of Fal Sivas's motor to a test," I replied.

I glanced up at the insensate metal sphere above my head. "Speed up! Faster! Escape the pursuing patrol boat!" Such were the directing thoughts that I imparted to the silent thing above me; then I waited.

I did not, however, have long to wait. No sooner had my thoughts impinged upon the sensitive mechanism than the accelerated whirr of the almost noiseless motor told me that my directions had been obeyed.

"She is no longer gaining on us," cried Zanda excitedly. "We have leaped ahead; we are outdistancing her."

The swift staccato of rapid fire burst upon our ears. Our enemy had opened fire upon us, and almost simultaneously, intermingling with the shots, we heard in the distance the wail of other sirens apprising us of the fact that reinforcements were closing in upon us.

The swift rush of the thin air of Mars along the sides of our ship attested our terrific speed. The lights of the city faded swiftly behind us. The searchlights of the patrol boats were rapidly diminishing bands of light across the starlit sky.

I do not know how fast we were going but probably in the neighborhood of 1350 haads an hour.

We sped low above the ancient sea bottom that lies west of Zodanga; and then, in a matter of about five minutes—it could not have been much more—our speed slackened rapidly, and I saw a small flier floating idly in the still air just ahead of us.

I knew that it must be the flier upon which Jat Or awaited me, and I directed the brain to bring our ship alongside it and stop.

The response of the ship to my every thought direction was uncanny; and when we came alongside of Jat Or's craft and seemingly ghostly hands opened the door in the side of our ship, I experienced a brief sensation of terror, as though I were in the power of some soulless Frankenstein; and this notwithstanding the fact that every move of the ship had been in response to my own direction.

Jat Or stood on the narrow deck of his small flier gazing in astonishment at the strange craft that had drawn alongside.

"Had I not been expecting this," he said, "I should have been streaking it for Helium by now. It is a sinister-looking affair with those great eyes giving it the appearance of some unworldly monster."

"You will find that impression intensified when you have been aboard her for a while," I told him. "She is very 'unworldly' in many respects."

"Do you want me to come aboard now?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "after we make disposition of your flier."

"What shall we do with it?" he asked. "Are you going to abandon it?"

"Set your destination compass on Helium, and open your throttle to half speed. When you are under way, we will come alongside again and take you aboard. One of the patrol boats at Helium will pick up the flier and return it to my hangar."

He did as I had bid, and I directed the brain to take us alongside of him after he had gotten under way. A moment later he stepped into the cabin of Fal Sivas's craft "Comfortable," he commented; "the old boy must be something of a Sybarite."

"He believed in being comfortable," I replied, "but love of luxury has softened his fibre to such an extent that he was afraid to venture abroad in his ship after he had completed it."

Jat Or turned to look about the cabin, and it chanced that his eyes fell upon the doors in the side of the ship just as I directed the brain to close them. He voiced an ejaculation of astonishment.

"In the name of my first ancestor," he exclaimed, "who is closing those doors? I don't see anyone, and you have not moved or touched any sort of operating device since I came aboard."

"Come forward into the control room," I said, "and you shall see the entire crew of this craft reposing in a metal case not much larger than your fist."

As we entered the control room, Jat Or saw Zanda for the first time. I could see his surprise reflected in his eyes, but he was too well bred to offer any comment.

"This is Zanda, Jat Or," I said. "Fal Sivas was about to remove her skull in the interests of science when I interrupted him this evening. The poor girl was forced to choose between the lesser of two evils;

that is why she is with me."

"That statement is a little misleading," said Zanda. "Even if my life had not been in danger and I had been surrounded by every safeguard and luxury, I would still have chosen to go with Vandor, even to the end of the universe."

"You see, Jat Or," I remarked, with a smile, "the young lady does not know me very well; when she does, she will very probably change her mind."

"Never," said Zanda.

"Wait and see," I cautioned her.

On our trip from Helium to Zodanga, I had explained to Jat Or the marvellous mechanism that Fal Sivas called a mechanical brain; and I could see the young padwar's eyes searching the interior of the control room for this marvellous invention.

"There it is," I said, pointing at the metal sphere slightly above his head in the nose of the craft.

"And that little thing drives the ship and opens the doors?" he asked.

"The motors drive the ship, Jat Or," I told him, "and other motors operate the doors and perform various other mechanical duties aboard the craft. The mechanical brain merely operates them as our brains would direct our hands to certain duties."

"That thing thinks?" he demanded.

"To all intents and purposes, it functions as would a human brain, the only difference being that it cannot originate thought."

The padwar stood gazing at the thing in silence for several moments. "It gives me a strange feeling," he said at last, "a helpless feeling, as though I were in the power of some creature that was omnipotent and yet could not reason."

"I have much the same sensation," I admitted, "and I cannot help but speculate upon what it might do if it could reason."

"I, too, tremble to think of it," said Zanda, "if Fal Sivas has imparted to it any of the heartless ruthlessness of his own mind."

"It is his creature," I reminded her.

"Then let us hope that it may never originate a thought."

"That, of course, would be impossible," said Jat Or.

"I do not know about that," replied Zanda. "Such a thing was in Fal Sivas's mind. He was, I know, working to that end; but whether he succeeded in imparting the power of original thought to this thing, I do not know. I know that he not only hoped to accomplish this miracle eventually, but that he was planning also to impart powers of speech to this horrible invention."

"Why do you call it horrible?" asked Jat Or.

"Because it is inhuman and unnatural," replied the girl. "Nothing good could come out of the mind of Fal Sivas. The thing you see there was conceived in hate and lust and greed, and it was contrived for the satisfaction of such characteristics in Fal Sivas. No ennobling or lofty thoughts went into its fabrication; and none could emanate from it, had it the power of original thought."

"But our purpose is lofty and honorable," I reminded her; "and if it serves us in the consummation of our hope, it will have accomplished good."

"Nevertheless, I fear it," replied Zanda. "I hate it because it reminds me of Fal Sivas."

"I hope that it is not meditating upon these candid avowals," remarked Jat Or.

Zanda slapped an open palm across her lips, her wide eyes reflecting a new terror. "I had not thought of that," she whispered. "Perhaps this very minute it is planning its revenge."

I could not but laugh at her fear. "If any harm befalls us through that brain, Zanda," I said, "you may lay the blame at my door, for it is my mind that shall actuate it as long as the ship remains in my possession."

"I hope you are right," she said, "and that it will bear us safely wherever you wish to go."

"And suppose we get to Thuria alive?" interjected Jat Or. "You know I have been wondering about that. I have been giving the matter considerable thought, naturally, since you said that that was to be our destination; and I am wondering how we will fare on that tiny satellite. We shall be so out of proportion in size to anything that we may find there."

"Perhaps we shall not be," I said, and then I explained to him the theory of compensatory adjustment of masses as Fal Sivas had

expounded it to me.

"It sounds preposterous," said Jat Or.

I shrugged. "It does to me, too," I admitted; "but no matter how much we may abhor Fal Sivas's character, we cannot deny the fact that he has a marvellous scientific brain; and I am going to hold my opinion in abeyance until we reach the surface of Thuria."

"At least," said Jat Or, "no matter what the conditions there may be, the abductors of the princess will have no advantage over us if we find them there."

"Do you doubt that we shall find them?" I asked.

"It is merely a matter of conjecture, one way or another," he replied; "but it does not seem within the realms of possibility that two inventors, working independently of one another, could each have conceived and built two identical ships capable of crossing the airless void between here and Thuria, under the guidance of mechanical brains."

"But as far as I know," I replied, "Gar Nal's craft is not so operated. Fal Sivas does not believe that Gar Nal has produced such a brain. He does not believe that the man has even conceived the possibility of one, and so we may assume that Gar Nal's craft is operated by Gar Nal, or at least wholly by human means."

"Then which ship has the better chance to reach Thuria?" asked Jat Or.

"According to Fal Sivas," I replied, "there can be no question about that. This mechanical brain of his cannot make mistakes."

"If we accept that," said Jat Or, "then we must also accept the possibility of Gar Nal's human brain erring in some respects in its calculations."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"It just occurred to me that through some error in calculations Gar Nal might not reach Thuria; whereas, directed by an errorless brain, we are certain to."

"I had not thought of that," I said, "I was so obsessed by the thought that Gar Nal and Ur Jan were taking their victim to Thuria that I never gave a thought to the possibility that they might not be able to get there."

The idea distressed me, for I realized how hopeless my quest must

be if we reached Thuria only to find that Dejah Thoris was not there. Where could I look for her? Where could I hope to find her in the illimitable reaches of space? But I soon cast these thoughts from me, for worry is a destructive force that I have tried to eliminate from my philosophy of life.

Zanda looked at me with a puzzled expression. "We are really going to Thuria?" she asked. "I do not understand why anyone should want to go to Thuria; but I am content to go, if you go. When do we start, Vandor?"

"We are well on our way, now," I replied. "The moment that Jat Or came aboard, I directed the brain to head for Thuria at full speed."

Chapter 15

THURIA

Later, as we hurtled on through the cold, dark reaches of space, I urged Zanda and Jat Or to lie down and rest.

Although we had no sleeping silks and furs we should not suffer, as the temperature of the cabin was comfortable. I had directed the brain to control this, as well as the oxygen supply, after we left the surface of Barsoom.

There were narrow but comfortable divans in the cabin, as well as a number of soft pillows; so there was no occasion for any of us suffering during the trip.

We had left Barsoom about the middle of the eighth zode, which is equivalent to midnight earth-time; and a rather rough computation of the distance to be travelled and our estimated speed, suggested that we should arrive on Thuria about noon of the following day.

Jat Or wanted to stand watch the full time, but I insisted that we must each get some sleep; so, on my promise to awaken him at the end of five hours, he lay down.

While my two companions slept, I made a more careful examination of the interior of the ship than I had been able to do at the time that Fal Sivas had conducted me through it.

I found it well supplied with food, and in a chest in the storeroom I also discovered sleeping silks and furs; but, of course, what interested me most of all were the weapons. There were long

swords, short swords, and daggers, as well as a number of the remarkable Barsoomian radium rifles and pistols, together with a considerable quantity of ammunition for both.

Fal Sivas seemed to have forgotten nothing, yet all his thought and care and efficiency would have gone for nothing had I not been able to seize the ship.

His own cowardice would have prevented him from using it; and of course he would not have permitted another to take it out, even had he believed that another brain than his could have operated it, which he had been confident was not possible.

My inspection of the ship completed, I went into the control room and looked out through one of the great eyes. The heavens were a black void shot with cold and glittering points of light. How different the stars looked when one had passed beyond the atmosphere of the planet.

I looked for Thuria. She was nowhere in sight. The discovery was a distinct shock. Had the mechanical brain failed us? While I was wasting my time inspecting the ship, was it bearing us off into some remote comer of space?

I am not inclined to lose my head and become hysterical when confronted by an emergency; nor, except when instant action is required, do I take snap judgment.

I am more inclined to think things out carefully, and so I sat down on a bench in the control room to work out my problem.

Just then Jat Or came in. "How long have I been sleeping?" he asked, "Not long," I replied; "you had better go back and get all the rest that you can."

"I am not sleepy," he said. "In fact it is rather difficult to contemplate sleep when one is in the midst of such a thrilling adventure. Think of it, my prince—"

"Vandor," I reminded him.

"Sometimes I forget," he said; "but, anyway, as I was saying, think of the possibilities; think of the tremendous possibilities of this adventure; think of our situation."

"I have been thinking of it," I replied a little gloomily.

"In a few hours we shall be where no other Barsoomian has ever been— upon Thuria."

"I am not so sure of that," I replied.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Take a look ahead," I told him. "Do you see anything of Thuria?"

He looked out of one of the round ports and then turned to the other. "I don't see Thuria," he said.

"Neither do I," I replied. "And do you realize what that suggests?"

He looked stunned for a moment. "You mean that we are not bound for Thuria—that the brain has erred?"

"I don't know," I replied.

"How far is it from Barsoom to Thuria?" he asked.

"A little over 15,700 haads," I replied. "I estimated that we should complete the trip in about five zodes."

Just then Thuria hurtled into view upon our right, and Jat Or voiced an exclamation of relief. "I have it," he exclaimed.

"What?" I asked.

"Your mechanical brain is functioning better than ours," he replied. "During the ten zodes of a Barsoomian day, Thuria revolves about our planet over three times; so while we were travelling to the path of her orbit she would encircle Barsoom one and a half times."

"And you think the mechanical brain has reasoned that out?"

"Unquestionably," he said; "and it will time our arrival to meet the satellite in its path."

I scratched my head. "This raises another question that I had not thought of before," I said.

"What is that?" asked Jat Or.

"The speed of our ship is approximately 3250 haads per zode, whereas Thuria is travelling at a rate of over 41,250 haads during the same period."

Jat Or whistled. "Over twelve and a half times our speed," he exclaimed. "How in the name of our first ancestor are we going to catch her?"

I made a gesture of resignation. "I imagine we shall have to leave that to the brain," I said.

"I hope it doesn't get us in the path of that hurtling mass of

destruction," said Jat Or.

"Just how would you make a landing if you were operating the ship with your own brain?" I asked.

"We've got to take Thuria's force of gravity into consideration," he said.

"That is just it," I replied. "When we get into the sphere of her influence, we shall be pulled along at the same rate she is going; and then we can make a natural landing."

Jat Or was looking out at the great orb of Thuria on our right. "How perfectly tremendous she looks," he said.. "It doesn't seem possible that we have come close enough to make her took as large as that."

"You forget," I said, "that as we approached her, we commenced to grow smaller—to proportion ourselves to her size. When we reach her surface, if we ever do, she will seem as large to us as Barsoom does when we are on its surface."

"It all sounds like a mad dream to me," said Jat Or.

"I fully agree with you," I replied, "but you will have to admit that it is going to be a most interesting dream."

As we sped on through space, Thuria hurtled across our bow and eventually disappeared below the Eastern rim of the planet that lay now so far below us.

Doubtless, when she completed another revolution, we should be within the sphere of her influence. Then, and not until then, would we know the outcome of this phase of our adventure.

I insisted now that Jat Or return to the cabin and get a few hours' sleep, for none of us knew what lay in the future and to what extent our reserves of strength, both physical and mental, might be called upon.

Later on, I called Jat Or and lay down myself to rest. Through it all, Zanda slept peacefully; nor did she awaken until after I had had my sleep and returned to the control room.

Jat Or was sitting with his face glued to the starboard eye. He did not look back at me, but evidently he heard me enter the cabin.

"She is coming," he said in a tense whisper. "Issus! What a magnificent and inspiring sight!"

I went to the port and looked out over his shoulder. There before me was a great world, one crescent edge illuminated by the sun beyond it. Vaguely I thought that I saw the contour of mountains and valleys, lighter expanses that might have been sandy desert or dead sea bottom, and dark masses that could have been forests. A new world! A world that no earthman nor any Barsoomian had ever visited.

I could have been thrilled beyond the power of words to express at the thought of the adventure that lay before me had my mind not been so overcast by fear for the fate of my princess. Thoughts of her dominated all others, yet they did not crowd out entirely the sense of magnificent mystery that the sight of this new world aroused within me.

Zanda joined us now; and as she saw Thuria looming ahead, she voiced a little exclamation of thrilled excitement. "We are very close," she said.

I nodded. "It will not be long now before we know our fate," I said. "Are you afraid?"

"Not while you are with me," she answered simply.

Presently I realized that we had changed our course. Thuria seemed directly beneath us now instead of straight ahead. We were within the sphere of her influence, and were being dragged through space at her own tremendous velocity.

Now we were spiralling downward; the brain was functioning perfectly.

"I don't like the idea of landing on a strange world at night," said Jat Or.

"I am not so enthusiastic about it myself," I agreed. "I think we had better wait until morning."

I then directed the brain to drop to within about two hundred haads of the surface of the satellite and cruise slowly in the direction of the coming dawn.

"And now, suppose we eat while we are waiting for daylight," I suggested.

"Is there food on board, master?" inquired Zanda.

"Yes," I replied, "you will find it in the storeroom abaft the cabin."

"I will prepare it, master, and serve you in the cabin," she said.

As she left the control room, Jat Or's eyes followed her. "She does not seem like a slave," he said, "and yet she addresses you as though she were your slave."

"I have told her that she is not," I said, "but she insists upon maintaining that attitude. She was a prisoner in the house of Fal Sivas, and she was assigned to me there to be my slave. She really is the daughter of a lesser noble—a well-bred, intelligent, cultured girl."

"And very beautiful," said Jat Or. "I think she loves you, my prince."

"Perhaps she thinks it is love," I said, "but it is only gratitude. If she knew who I were, even her gratitude would be turned to hate. She has sworn to kill John Carter."

"But why?" demanded Jat Or.

"Because he conquered Zodanga; because all her sorrows resulted from the fall of the city. Her father was killed; and, in grief, her mother took the last long journey upon the bosom of Iss; so you see she has good reason to hate John Carter, or at least she thinks she has."

Presently Zanda called us, and we went into the cabin where she had a meal spread upon a folding table.

She stood to wait upon us, but I insisted that she sit with us and eat.

"It is not seemly," she said, "that a slave should sit with her master."

"Again I tell you that you are not my slave, Zanda," I said. "If you insist upon retaining this ridiculous attitude, I shall have to give you away. Perhaps I shall give you to Jat Or. How would you like that?"

She looked up at the handsome young padwar seated opposite her. "Perhaps he would make a good master," she said, "but I shall be slave to no one but Vandor."

"But how could you help it if I gave you to him?" I asked. "What would you do about it?"

"I would kill either Jat Or or myself," she replied.

I laughed and stroked her hand. "I would not give you away if I could," I said.

"If you could?" she demanded. "Why can't you?"

"Because I cannot give away a free woman. I told you once that you were free, and now I tell you again in the presence of a witness. You know the customs of Barsoom, Zanda. You are free now, whether you wish to be or not."

"I do not wish to be free," she said; "but if it is your will, Vandor, so be it." She was silent for a moment, and then she looked up at me. "If I am not your slave," she asked, "what am I?"

"Just at present, you are a fellow adventurer," I replied, "an equal, to share in the joys and sorrows of whatever may lie before us."

"I am afraid that I shall be more of a hindrance than a help," she said, "but of course I can cook for you and minister to you. At least I can do those things which are a woman's province."

"Then you will be more of a help than a hindrance," I told her. "And to make sure that we shall not lose you, I shall detail Jat Or to be your protector. He shall be responsible for your safety."

I could see that this pleased Jat Or, but I could not tell about Zanda. I thought she looked a little hurt; but she flashed a quick sweet smile at the young padwar, as though she were afraid he might have guessed her disappointment and did not wish to hurt him.

As we cruised low over Thuria, I saw forests below us and meandering lines of a lighter color that I took to be brooks or rivers; and in the distance there were mountains. It seemed a most beautiful and intriguing world.

I could not be sure about the water because it was generally believed on Barsoom that her satellites were practically without moisture. However, I have known scientists to be mistaken.

I was becoming impatient. It seemed that daylight would never arrive, but at last the first rosy flush of dawn crept up behind the mountain tops ahead of us; and slowly the details of this strange world took form below us, as the scene in a photographic print takes magic form beneath the developer.

We were looking down upon a forested valley, beyond which low foothills, carpeted with lush vegetation, ran back to higher mountains in the distance.

The colors were similar to those upon Barsoom—the scarlet

grasses, the gorgeous, strange-hued trees; but as far as our vision reached, we saw no living thing.

"There must be life there," said Zanda, when Jat Or commented upon this fact.

"In all that wealth of beauty, there must be living eyes to see and to admire."

"Are we going to land?" asked Jat Or.

"We came here to find Gar Nal's ship," I replied, "and we must search for that first."

"It will be like looking for a tiny bead among the moss of a dead sea bottom," said Jat Or.

I nodded. "I am afraid so," I said, "but we have come for that purpose and that purpose alone."

"Look!" exclaimed Zanda. "What is that—there, ahead?"

Chapter 16

INVISIBLE FOES

Looking down in the direction that Zanda had indicated, I saw what appeared to be a large building on the bank of a river. The structure nestled in a clearing in the forest, and where the rising sun touched its towers they sent back scintillant rays of many-hued light.

One section of the building faced upon what appeared to be a walled court, and it was an object lying in this court which aroused our interest and excitement to a far greater extent than the building itself.

"What do you think it is, Zanda?" I asked, for it was she who had discovered it.

"I think that it is Gar Nal's ship," replied the girl.

"What makes you think that?" asked Jat Or.

"Because it is so much like this one," she replied. "Both Gar Nal and Fal Savas stole ideas from one another whenever they could, and I should be surprised indeed if their ships did not closely resemble one another."

"I am sure that you are right, Zanda," I said. "It is not reasonable to assume that the inhabitants of Thuria have, by some miraculous coincidence, constructed a ship so similar to that of Fal Sivas's; and the possibility is equally remote that a third Barsoomian ship has landed on the satellite."

I directed the brain to spiral downward, and presently we were

flying at an altitude that gave us a clear view of the details of the building and the surrounding terrain.

The more closely we approached the ship in the courtyard the more certain we became that it was Gar Nal's; but nowhere did we see any sign of Gar Nal, Ur Jan, or Dejah Thoris; nor, indeed, was there any sign of life about the building or its grounds. The place might have been the abode of the dead.

"I am going to ground the ship beside Gar Nal's," I said. "Look to your weapons, Jat Or."

"They are ready, my—Vandor," he replied.

"I do not know how many fighting men are aboard that ship," I continued. "There may be only Gar Nal and Ur Jan, or there may be more. If the fight goes our way, we must not kill them all until we are positive that the princess is with them.

"They left Barsoom at least a full day ahead of us; and while it is only a remote possibility, still they may have made some disposition of their prisoner already. Therefore, we must leave at least one of them alive to direct us to her."

We were descending slowly. Every eye was on the alert. Zanda had stepped from the control room a moment before, and now she returned with the harness and weapons of a Martian warrior strapped to her slender form.

"Why those?" I asked.

"You may need an extra sword hand," she replied. "You do not know against how many foemen you will be pitted."

"Wear them, if you like," I said, "but remain in the ship where you will be safe. Jat Or and I will take care of the fighting."

"I shall go with you and fight with you," said Zanda, quietly but emphatically.

I shook my head. "No," I said; "you must do as I say and remain on this ship."

She looked me steadily in the eye. "Against my will, you insisted upon making me a free woman," she reminded me. "Now I shall act as a free woman and not as a slave. I shall do as I please."

I had to smile at that. "Very well," I said; "but if you come with us, you will have to take your chances like any other fighting man. Jat Or and I may be too busy with our own antagonists to be able to

protect you."

"I can take care of myself," said Zanda, simply.

"Please stay on board," pleaded Jat Or solicitiously; but Zanda only shook her head.

Our ship had settled quietly to the ground beside that of Gar Nal. I caused the door in the port side to be opened and the ladder lowered. Still there was no sign of life either on the other craft or elsewhere about the castle. A deathly silence hung like a heavy mantle over the entire scene.

Just a moment I stood in the doorway looking about; and then I descended to the ground, followed by Jat Or and Zanda.

Before us loomed the castle, a strange weird building of unearthly architecture, a building of many towers of various types, some of them standing alone and some engaged in groups.

Partially verifying Fal Sivas's theory of the tremendous mineral wealth of the satellite, the walls of the structure before us were constructed of blocks of precious stones so arranged that their gorgeous hues blended and harmonized into a mass of color that defies description.

At the moment, however, I gave but cursory attention to the beauties of the pile, turning my attention instead to Gar Nal's ship. A door in its side, similar to that in our ship, was open; and a ladder depended to the ground.

I knew that in ascending that ladder, a man would be at great disadvantage if attacked from above; but there was no alternative. I must discover if there were anyone on board.

I asked Zanda to stand at a little distance, so that she could see into the interior of the ship and warn me if an enemy exhibited himself. Then I mounted quickly.

As the ship was already resting on the ground, I had only to ascend a few rungs of the ladder before my eyes were above the level of the cabin floor. A quick glance showed me that no one was in sight, and a moment later I stood inside the cabin of Gar Nal's ship.

The interior arrangement was slightly different from that of Fal Sivas's, nor was the cabin as richly furnished.

From the cabin, I stepped into the control room. No one was

there. Then I searched the after part of the ship. The entire craft was deserted.

Returning to the ground, I reported my findings to Jat Or and Zanda.

"It is strange," remarked Jat Or, "that no one has challenged us or paid any attention to our presence. Can it be possible that the whole castle is deserted?"

"There is something eerie about the place," said Zanda, in low, tense tones.

"Even the silence seems fraught with suppressed sound. I see no one, I hear no one, and yet I feel—I know not what."

"It is mysterious," I agreed. "The deserted appearance of the castle is belied by the well-kept grounds. If there is no one here now, it has not been deserted long."

"I have a feeling that it is not deserted now," said Jat Or. "I seem to feel presences all around us. I could swear that eyes were on us—many eyes, watching our every move."

I was conscious of much the same sensation myself. I looked up at the windows of the castle, fully expecting to see eyes gazing down upon us; but in none of the many windows was there a sign of life. Then I called aloud, voicing the common peace greeting of Barsoom.

"Kaor!" I shouted in tones that could have been heard anywhere upon that side of the castle. "We are travellers from Barsoom. We wish to speak to the lord of the castle."

Silence was my only answer.

"How uncanny!" cried Zanda. "Why don't they answer us? There must be someone here; there is someone here. I know it! I cannot see them, but there are people here. They are all around us."

"I am sure that you are right, Zanda," I said. "There must be someone in that castle, and I am going to have a look inside it. Jat Or, you and Zanda wait here."

"I think we should all go together," said the girl.

"Yes," agreed Jat Or; "we must not separate."

I saw no valid objection to the plan, and so I nodded my acquiescence; then I approached a closed door in the face of the

castle wall. Behind me came Jat Or and Zanda.

We had crossed about half the distance from the ship to the door, when at last suddenly, startlingly, the silence was shattered by a voice, terror-ridden, coming from above, apparently from one of the lofty towers overlooking the courtyard.

"Escape, my chieftain!" it cried. "Escape from this horrible place while you may."

I halted, momentarily stunned—it was the voice of Dejah Thoris.

"The princess!" exclaimed Jat Or.

"Yes," I said, "the princess. Come!" Then I started on a run toward the door of the castle; but I had taken scarce a half dozen steps, when just behind me Zanda voiced a piercing scream of terror.

I wheeled instantly to see what danger confronted her.

She was struggling as though in the throes of convulsions. Her face was contorted in horror; her staring eyes and the motions of her arms and legs were such as they might have been had she been battling with a foe, but she was alone. There was no one near her.

Jat Or and I sprang toward her; but she retreated quickly, still struggling.

Darting to our right, and then doubling back, she moved in the direction of the doorway in the castle wall.

She seemed not to move by the power of her own muscles but rather as though she were being dragged away, yet still I saw no one near her.

All that I take so long to tell, occurred in a few brief seconds—before I could cover the short distance to her side.

Jat Or had been closer to her; and he had almost overtaken her when I heard him shout, "Issus! It has me, too."

He went to the ground then as though in a faint, but he was struggling as Zanda struggled—as one who gives battle to an assailant.

As I raced after Zanda my long sword was out, though I saw no enemy whose blood it might drink.

Scarcely ever before in my life have I felt so futile, so impotent. Here was I, the greatest swordsman of two worlds, helpless in defense of my friends because I could not see their foes.

In the grip of what malign power could they be that could seemingly reach out through space from the concealment of some hidden vantage point and hold them down or drag them about as it wished?

How helpless we all were, our helplessness all the more accentuated by the psychological effect of this mysterious and uncanny attack.

My earthly muscles quickly brought me to Zanda's side. As I reached out to seize her and stop her progress toward the castle door, something seized one of my ankles; and I went down. I felt hands upon me—many hands. My sword was tom from my grasp; my other weapons were snatched away.

I fought, perhaps never as I have fought before. I felt the bodies of my antagonists pressing against me. I felt their hands as they touched me and their fists as they struck me; but I saw no one, yet my own blows landed upon solid flesh. That was something. It gave me a little greater sense of equality than before; but I could not understand why, if I felt these creatures, I could not see them.

At least, however, it partially explained the strange actions of Zanda. Her seeming convulsions had been her struggles against these unseen assailants. Now they were carrying her toward the doorway; and as I battled futilely against great odds, I saw her disappear within the castle.

Then the things, whatever they were that assailed me, overpowered me by numbers.

I knew that there were very many of them, because there were so many, many hands upon me.

They bound my wrists behind my back and jerked me roughly to my feet.

I cannot accurately describe my sensations; the unreality of all that had occurred in those few moments left me dazed and uncertain. For at least once in my life, I seemed wholly deprived of the power to reason, possibly because the emergency was so utterly foreign to anything that I had ever before experienced.

Not even the phantom bowmen of Lothar could have presented so unique a situation, for these were visible when they attacked.

As I was jerked to my feet, I glanced about for Jat Or and saw

him near me, his hands similarly trussed behind his back.

Now I felt myself being pushed toward the doorway through which Zanda had disappeared, and near me was Jat Or moving in the same direction.

"Can you see anyone, my prince?" he asked.

"I can see you," I replied.

"What diabolical force is this that has seized us?" he demanded.

"I don't know," I replied, "but I feel hands upon me and the warmth of bodies around me."

"I guess we are done for, my prince," he said.

"Done for?" I exclaimed. "We still live."

"No, I do not mean that," he said; "I mean that as far as ever returning to Barsoom. is concerned, we might as well give up all hope. They have our ship. Do you think that even if we escape them, we shall ever see it again, or at least be able to repossess it? No, my friend, as far as Barsoom is concerned we are as good as dead."

The ship! In the excitement of what I had just passed through I had momentarily forgotten the ship. I glanced toward it. I thought that I saw the rope ladder move as though to the weight of an unseen body ascending it.

The ship! It was our only hope of ever again returning to Barsoom, and it was in the hands of this mysterious unseen foe. It must be saved.

There was a way! I centered my thoughts upon the mechanical brain—I directed it to rise and wait above the castle, out of harm's way, until I gave it further commands.

Then the invisible menace dragged me through the doorway into the interior of the castle. I could not know if the brain had responded to my directions.

Was I never to know?

Chapter 17

THE CAT-MAN

My thoughts were still centered upon the brain in the nose of Fal Sivas's ship as I was being conducted through a wide corridor in the castle. I was depressed by the fear that I might not have been able to impart my controlling directions to it at so great a distance or while my brain was laboring under the stress and excitement of the moment. The ship meant so much to us all, and was so necessary to the rescue of Dejah Thoris, that the thought of losing it was a stunning blow; yet presently I realized that worrying about it would do no good, and so I expelled these subversive thoughts from my mind.

Raising my eyes, I saw Jat Or moving along the corridor near me. As he caught my eyes upon him, he shook his head and smiled ruefully.

"It looks as though our adventure on Thuria might be short-lived," he said.

I nodded. "The future doesn't look any too bright," I admitted. "I have never been in such a situation before, where I could neither see my enemy nor communicate with him."

"Nor hear him," added Jat Or. "Except for the feel of hands on my arms and the knowledge that some force is dragging me along this corridor, I am not conscious of the presence of any but ourselves here. The mystery of it leaves me with a sense of utter futility."

"But eventually we must find someone whom we can see and

against whom we can pit our own brain and fighting ability on a more equable basis, for this castle and what we see about us indicate the presence of creatures not unlike ourselves. Notice, for instance, the benches and divans along the walls of this corridor.

"They must have been intended for creatures like ourselves. The beautiful mosaics that decorate the walls, the gorgeous rugs and skins upon the floor—these things are here to satisfy a love of beauty that is a peculiar attribute of the human mind, nor could they have been conceived or produced except by human hands under the guidance of human brains."

"Your deductions are faultless," replied Jat Or, "but where are the people?"

"There lies the mystery," I replied. "I can well believe that our future depends upon its solution."

"While I am concerned with all these questions," said Jat Or presently, "I am more concerned with the fate of Zanda. I wonder what they have done with her."

That, of course, I could not answer, although the fact that she had been separated from us caused me no little concern.

At the end of the corridor, we were conducted up a wide and ornate staircase to the next level of the castle; and presently we were led into a large room—a vast chamber in which we saw at the far end a single, lonely figure.

It was Zanda. She was standing before a dais upon which were two large ornate throne chairs.

The room was gorgeous, almost barbaric in its decoration. Gold and precious stones encrusted floor and walls. They had been fabricated into an amazing design by some master artist who had had at his disposal rare gems such as I had never seen either upon earth or upon Barsoom.

The invisible force that propelled us conducted us to Zanda's side; and there the three of us stood, facing the dais and the empty throne chairs.

But I wondered if they were empty. I had that same strange feeling that I had noticed in the courtyard, of being surrounded by a multitude of people, of having many eyes fixed upon me; yet I saw none and I heard no sound.

We stood there before the dais for several minutes, and then we were dragged away and conducted from the room. Along another corridor we were taken, a narrower corridor, and up a winding stairway which Jat Or had some little difficulty in negotiating. Such contrivances were new to him, as stairways are not used on Mars, where inclined ramps lead from one level of a building to another.

I had once tried to introduce stairways in my palace in Helium; but so many of my household and my friends came near breaking their necks on them, that I eventually replaced them with ramps.

After ascending several levels, Zanda was separated from us and taken along a diverging corridor; and at another level above, Jat Or was dragged away from me.

None of us had spoken since we had entered the great throne room, and I think that now that we were being separated words seemed wholly inadequate in the hopelessness of our situation.

Now I was quite alone; but yet up and up I climbed, guided by those invisible hands upon my arms. Where were they taking me? To what fate had they taken my companions? Somewhere in this great castle was the princess whom I had crossed the void to find, yet never had she seemed farther away from me than at this minute; never had our separation seemed so utterly complete and final.

I do not know why I should have felt this way, unless again it was the effect of this seemingly unfathomable mystery that surrounded me.

We had ascended to such a great height that I was confident that I was being conducted into one of the loftier towers in the castle that I had seen from the courtyard. Something in this fact and the fact that we had been separated suggested that whatever the power that held us, it was not entirely certain of itself; for only fear that we might escape or that, banded together, we might inflict harm upon it, could have suggested the necessity for separating us; but whether or not I reasoned from a correct premise was only conjecture. Time alone could solve the mystery and answer the many questions that presented themselves to my mind.

My mind was thus occupied when I was halted before a door. It had a peculiar latch which attracted my attention, and while I was watching it I saw it move as though a hand turned it; then the door

swung in, and I was dragged into the room beyond.

Here the bonds were cut from my wrists. I turned quickly intending to make a bolt for the door; but before I could reach it, it closed in my face. I tried to open it, but it was securely locked; and then, disgusted, I turned away from it.

As I turned to inspect my prison, my eyes fell upon a figure seated upon a bench at the far side of the room.

For want of a better word, I may describe the figure that I saw as that of a man; but what a man!

The creature was naked except for a short leather skirt held about its hips by a broad belt fastened by a huge golden buckle set with precious stones.

He was seated upon a red bench against a panel of grey wall; and his skin was exactly the color of the wall, except that portion of his legs which touched the bench. They were red.

The shape of his skull was similar to that of a human being, but his features were most inhuman. In the center of his forehead was a single, large eye about three inches in diameter; the pupil a vertical slit, like the pupils of a cat's eyes. He sat there eyeing me with that great eye, apparently appraising me as I was appraising him; and I could not but wonder if I presented as strange an appearance to him as he did to me.

During those few moments that we remained motionless, staring at one another, I hurriedly took note of several of his other strange physical characteristics.

The fingers of his hands and four of the toes of each of his feet were much longer than in the human race, while his thumbs and large toes were considerably shorter than his other digits and extended laterally at right angles to his hands and feet.

This fact and the vertical pupils of his eye suggested that he might be wholly arboreal or at least accustomed to finding his food or his prey in trees.

But perhaps the most outstanding features of his hideous countenance were his mouths. He had two of them, one directly above the other. The lower mouth, which was the larger, was lipless, the skin of the face forming the gums in which the teeth were set, with the result that his powerful white teeth were always

exposed in a hideous, death-like grin.

The upper mouth was round, with slightly protruding lips controlled by a sphincter-like muscle. This mouth was toothless.

His nose was wide and flat, with upturned nostrils. At first I detected no ears, but later discovered that two small orifices near the top of the head and at opposite sides served the purposes of audition.

Starting slightly above his eye, a stiff yellowish mane about two inches wide ran back along the center of his cranium.

All in all, he was a most unlovely spectacle; and that grinning mouth of his and those powerful teeth, taken in connection with his very noticeable muscular development, suggested that he might be no mean antagonist.

I wondered if he were as ferocious as he looked, and it occurred to me that I might have been locked in here with this thing that it might destroy me. It even seemed possible that I might be intended to serve as its food.

Not once since I had entered the room had the creature taken that single, awful eye from me, nor in fact had I looked elsewhere than at it; but now, having partially satisfied my curiosity insofar as that could be accomplished by vision, I let my eyes wander about the room.

It was circular and evidently occupied the entire area and evidently the highest level of a tower. The walls were panelled in different colors; and even here in this high-flung prison cell was evidence of the artistic sensibilities of the builder of the castle, for the room was indeed strangely beautiful.

The circular wall was pierced by half a dozen tall, narrow windows. They were unglazed, but they were barred.

On the floor, against one portion of the wall, was a pile of rugs and skins—probably the bedding of the creature imprisoned here.

I walked toward one of the windows to look out, and as I did so the creature rose from the bench and moved to the side of the room farthest from me. It moved noiselessly with the stealthy tread of a cat; and always it transfixed me with that terrible, lidless eye.

Its silence, its stealth, its horrible appearance, made me wary lest it leap upon my back should I turn my face away from it. Yet I cast

a hasty glance through the window and caught a glimpse of distant hills and, below me, just outside the castle wall, a river and beyond that a dense forest.

What little I saw suggested that the tower did not overlook the courtyard in which the ship lay, and I was anxious to see that part of the castle grounds to ascertain if I had been successful in directing the brain to take the ship to a point of safety.

I thought that perhaps I might be able to discover this from one of the windows on the opposite side of the tower; and so, keeping my eyes on my cell-mate, I crossed the room; and as I did so he quickly changed his position, keeping as far from me as possible.

I wondered if he were afraid of me or if, cat-like, he were just awaiting an opportunity to pounce on me when he could take me at a disadvantage.

I reached the opposite window and looked out, but I could see nothing of the courtyard, as others of the numerous towers of the castle obstructed my view on this side. In fact, another loftier tower rose directly in front of me in this direction and not more than ten or fifteen feet distant from the one in which I was incarcerated.

Similarly, I moved from window to window searching in vain for a glimpse of the courtyard; and always my weird and terrible cell-mate kept his distance from me.

Having convinced myself that I could not see the courtyard nor discover what success I had had in saving the ship, I turned my attention again to my companion.

I felt that I must learn something of what his attitude toward me might be. If he were to prove dangerous, I must ascertain the fact before night fell; for something seemed to tell me that that great eye could see by night; and inasmuch I could not remain awake forever, I must fall easy prey to him in the darkness of the night, if his intentions were lethal.

As I glanced at him again, I noticed a surprising change in his appearance. His skin was no longer grey but vivid yellow, and then I noted that he was standing directly in front of a yellow panel. This was interesting in the extreme.

I moved toward him, and again he changed his position. This time he placed himself in front of a blue panel, and I saw the yellow tint of his skin fade away and turn to blue.

On Barsoom there is a little reptile called a darseen which changes its colors to harmonize with its background, just as do our earthly chameleons; but I had never seen any creature even remotely resembling a human being endowed with this faculty of protective coloration. Here, indeed, was the most amazing of all the amazing creatures that I have ever seen.

I wondered if it were endowed with speech, and so I addressed it. "Kaor!" I said; "let's be friends," and I raised my sword hand above my head with the palm toward him, indicating my friendly intentions.

He looked at me for a moment; and then from his upper mouth issued strange sounds, like the purring and meowing of a cat.

He was trying to speak to me, but I could not understand him any more than he could understand me.

How was I to learn his intentions toward me before night fell?

It seemed hopeless, and I resigned myself to wait with composure whatever might occur. I therefore decided to ignore the presence of the creature until it made advances, either hostile or otherwise; and so I walked over and seated myself on the bench that it had quitted.

Immediately it took up a new position as far from me as possible and this time in front of a green panel, whereupon its color immediately changed to green. I could not but wonder what kaleidoscopic result would be obtained were I to chase the thing around this multi-colored apartment. The thought caused me to smile, and as I did so I saw an immediate reaction in my cell-mate. He made a strange purring sound and stretched his upper mouth laterally in what might have been an attempt at an answering smile. At the same time he rubbed his palms up and down his thighs.

It occurred to me that the stretching of the mouth and the rubbing of the thighs might constitute the outward expression of an inner emotion and be intended to denote its attitude toward me; but whether that attitude were friendly or hostile, I could not know. Perhaps my smile had conveyed to the creature a meaning wholly at variance with what a smile is usually intended to convey among the human inhabitants of Earth or Mars.

I recalled that I had discovered this to be a fact among the green men of Barsoom, who laugh the loudest when they are inflicting the most diabolical tortures upon their victims; although that is scarcely

analogous to what I mean, as in the case of the green Martians, it is the result of a highly specialized perversion of the sense of humor.

Perhaps, on the other hand, the grimace and the gesture of the creature constituted a challenge. If that were true, the sooner I discovered it the better. In fact, it was far more necessary to know the truth at once, if he were unfriendly, than if he were friendly. If the former were true, I wanted to know it before darkness fell.

It occurred to me that I might gain some knowledge of his intentions by repeating his own gestures, and so I smiled at him and rubbed my palms up and down my thighs.

His reaction was immediate. His upper mouth stretched sideways; he came toward me. I stood up as he approached, and when he came quite close to me, he stopped; and reaching forth one of his hands stroked my upper arm.

I could not but believe that this was an overture of friendship, and so I similarly stroked one of his arms.

The result astounded me. The creature leaped back from me, that strange purring noise issuing from its lips; and then it broke into a wild dance. With cat-like springs, it leaped and cavorted about the room in wild abandon.

Hideous and grotesque as was its physical appearance, yet was I impressed by the consummate grace of all its movements.

Three turns about the room it took, as I seated myself again upon the bench and watched it; then, its dance completed, it came and sat down beside me.

Once again it purred and meowed in an evident attempt to communicate with me; but I could only shake my head, to indicate that I did not understand, and speak to it in the tongue of Barsoom.

Presently it ceased its meowing and addressed me in a language that seemed far more human—a language that employed almost the same vowel and consonant sounds as those languages of the human race to which I am accustomed.

Here, at last, I detected a common ground upon which we might discover mutual understanding.

It was obvious that the creature could not understand any language that I could speak, and it would serve no purpose to attempt to teach him any of them; but if I could learn his language I

would then be able to communicate with some of the inhabitants of Thuria; and if the creatures of Thuria had a common language as did the inhabitants of Mars, then my existence upon this tiny satellite would be fraught with fewer difficulties.

But how to learn his language? That was the question. My captors might not permit me to live long enough to learn anything; but if I were to accept such an assumption as final, it would preclude me from making any attempt to escape or to alleviate my condition here. Therefore I must assume that I had plenty of time to learn one of the languages of Thuria, and I immediately set about to do so.

I commenced in the usual way that one learns a new language. I pointed to various articles in the room and to various parts of our bodies, repeating their names in my own language. My companion seemed to understand immediately what I was attempting to do; and pointing to the same articles himself, he repeated their names several times in the more human of the two languages which he seemed to command, if his meowings and purrings could be called a language, a question which, at that time, I should have been unable to answer.

We were thus engaged when the door to the room opened; and several vessels appeared to float in and settle themselves on the floor just inside the door, which was immediately closed.

My companion commenced to purr excitedly, and ran over to them. He returned immediately with a jar of water and a bowl of food which he set on the bench beside me. He pointed to the food and then to me, as though indicating that it was mine.

Crossing the room once more, he returned with another jar of water and a cage containing a most remarkable-appearing bird.

I call the thing a bird because it had wings; but to what family it belonged, your guess is as good as mine. It had four legs and the scales of a fish, but its beak and comb gave its strange face a bird-like appearance.

The food in the bowl set before me was a mixture of vegetables, fruit, and meat.

I imagine that it was very nutritious, and it was quite palatable.

As I quenched my thirst from the jar and sampled the food that had been brought me, I watched my companion. For a moment or two he played with the bird in the cage. He inserted a finger

between the bars, whereat the creature flapped its wings, voiced a shrill scream, and tried to seize the finger with its beak. It never quite succeeded, however, as my cell-mate always withdrew his finger in time. He seemed to derive a great deal of pleasure from this, as he purred constantly.

Finally he opened the door in the cage and liberated the captive. Immediately the creature fluttered about the room, seeking to escape through the windows; but the bars were too close together. Then my companion commenced to stalk it, for all the world like a cat stalking its prey. When the thing alighted, he would creep stealthily upon it; and when he was close enough, pounce for it.

For some time it succeeded in eluding him; but finally he struck it down heavily to the floor, partially stunning it. After this he played with it, pawing it around. Occasionally he would leave it and move about the room pretending that he did not see it. Presently he would seem to discover it anew, and then he would rush for it and pounce upon it.

At last, with a hideous coughing roar that sounded like the roar of a lion, he leaped ferociously upon it and severed its head with a single bite of his powerful jaws. Immediately he transferred the neck to his upper mouth and sucked the blood from the carcass. It was not a pretty sight.

When the blood had been drained, he devoured his prey with his lower jaws; and as he tore at it he growled like a feeding lion.

I finished my own meal slowly, while across the room from me my cell-mate tore at the carcass of his kill, swallowing in great gulps until he devoured every last vestige of it.

His meal completed, he crossed to the bench and drained his water jar, drinking through his upper mouth.

He paid no attention to me during all these proceedings; and now, purring lazily, he walked over to the pile of skins and cloths upon the floor and lying down upon them curled up and went to sleep.

Chapter 18

CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Youth adapts itself easily to new conditions and learns quickly; and, though only my Creator knows how old I am, I still retain the characteristics of youth.

Aided by this fact, as well as by a sincere desire to avail myself of every means of self-preservation, I learned the language of my companion quickly and easily.

The monotony of the days that followed my capture was thus broken, and time did not hang so heavily upon my hands as it would otherwise.

I shall never forget the elation that I felt when I realized that my cell-mate and myself were at last able to communicate our thoughts to one another, but even before that time arrived we had learned one another's name. His was Umka.

The very first day that I discovered that I could express myself well enough for him to understand me, I asked him who it was that held us prisoners.

"The Tarids," he replied.

"What are they?" I asked. "What do they look like? Why do we never see them?"

"I do see them," he replied. "Don't you?"

"No; what do they look like?"

"They look very much like you," he replied; "at least they are the

same sort of creature. They have two eyes and a nose and only one mouth, and their ears are big things stuck on the sides of their heads like yours. They are not beautiful like we Masenas."

"But why do I not see them?" I demanded.

"You don't know how," he replied. "If you knew how, you could see them as plainly as I do."

"I should like very much to see them," I told him. "Can you tell me how I may do so?"

"I can tell you," he said, "but that does not mean that you will be able to see them. Whether you do or not will depend upon your own mental ability. The reason you do not see them is because by the power of their own minds they have willed that you shall not see them. If you can free your mind of this inhibition, you can see them as plainly as you see me."

"But I don't know just how to go about it."

"You must direct your mind upon theirs in an effort to overcome their wish by a wish of your own. They wish that you should not see them. You must wish that you should see them. They were easily successful with you, because, not expecting such a thing, your mind had set up no defense mechanism against it. Now you have the advantage upon your side, because they have willed an unnatural condition, whereas you will have nature's forces behind you, against which, if your mind is sufficiently powerful, they can erect no adequate mental barrier."

Well, it sounded simple enough; but I am no hypnotist, and naturally I had considerable doubt as to my ability along these lines.

When I explained this to Umka, he growled impatiently.

"You can never succeed," he said, "if you harbor such doubts. Put them aside. Believe that you will succeed, and you will have a very much greater chance for success."

"But how can I hope to accomplish anything when I cannot see them?" I asked.

"And even if I could see them, aside from a brief moment that the door is open when food is brought us, I have no opportunity to see them."

"That is not necessary," he replied. "You think of your friends, do

you not, although you cannot see them now?"

"Yes, of course, I think of them; but what has that to do with it?"

"It merely shows that your thoughts can travel anywhere. Direct your thoughts, therefore, upon these Tarids. You know that the castle is full of them, because I have told you so. Just direct your mind upon the minds of all the inhabitants of the castle, and your thoughts will reach them all even though they may not be cognizant of it."

"Well, here goes," I said; "wish me luck."

"It may take some time," he explained. "It was a long time after I learned the secret before I could pierce their invisibility."

I set my mind at once upon the task before me, and kept it there when it was not otherwise occupied; but Umka was a loquacious creature; and having long been denied an opportunity for speech, he was now making up for lost time.

He asked me many questions about myself and the land from which I came, and seemed surprised to think that there were living creatures upon the great world that he saw floating in the night sky.

He told me that his people, the Masenas, lived in the forest in houses built high among the trees. They were not a numerous people, and so they sought districts far from the other inhabitants of Thuria.

The Tarids, he said, had once, been a powerful people; but they had been overcome in war by another nation and almost exterminated.

Their enemies still hunted them down, and there would long since have been none of them left had not one of their wisest men developed among them the hypnotic power which made it possible for them to seemingly render themselves invisible to their enemies.

"All that remain of the Tarids," said Umka, "live here in this castle. There are about a thousand of them altogether, men, women, and children.

"Hiding here, in this remote part of the world, in an effort to escape their enemies, they feel that all other creatures are their foes. Whoever comes to the castle of the Tarids is an enemy to be destroyed."

"They will destroy us, you think?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied.

"But when, and how?" I demanded.

"They are governed by some strange belief," explained Umka; "I do not understand it, but every important act in their lives is regulated by it. They say that they are guided by the sun and the moon and the stars.

"It is all very foolish, but they will not kill us until the sun tells them to, and then they will not kill us for their own pleasure but because they believe that it will make the sun happy."

"You think, then, that my friends, who are also prisoners here, are still alive and safe?"

"I don't know, but I think so," he replied. "The fact that you are alive indicates that they have not sacrificed the others, for I know it is usually their custom to save their captives and destroy them all in a single ceremony."

"Will they destroy you at the same time?"

"I think they will."

"And you are resigned to your fate, or would you escape if you could?"

"I should certainly escape, if I had the chance," he replied; "but I shall not have the chance; neither will you."

"If I could only see these people and talk to them," I said, "I might find the way whereby we could escape. I might even convince them that I and my friends are not their enemies, and persuade them to treat us as friends. But what can I do? I cannot see them; and even if I could see them, I could not hear them. The obstacles seem insuperable."

"If you can succeed in overcoming the suggestion of their invisibility which they have implanted in your mind," said Umka, "you can also overcome the other suggestion which renders them inaudible to you. Have you been making any efforts along these lines?"

"Yes; I am almost constantly endeavoring to throw off the hypnotic spell."

Each day, near noon, our single meal was served to us. It was always the same.

We each received a large jar of water, I a bowl of food, and Umka a cage containing one of the strange bird-like animals which apparently formed his sole diet.

After Umka had explained how I might overcome the hypnotic spell that had been placed upon me and thus be able to see and hear my captors, I had daily placed myself in a position where, when the door was opened to permit our food to be placed within the room, I could see out and discover if the Tarid who brought our food to us was visible to me.

It was always with a disheartening sense of frustration that I saw the receptacles containing the food and water placed upon the floor just inside the door by invisible hands.

Hopeless as my efforts seemed, I still persisted in them, hoping stubbornly against hope.

I was sitting one day thinking of the hopelessness of Dejah Thoris's situation, when I heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor beyond our door and the scraping of metal against metal, such as the metal of a warrior makes when it scrapes against the buckles of his harness and against his other weapons.

These were the first sounds that I had heard, other than those made by Umka and myself—the first signs of life within the great castle of the Tarids since I had been made a captive there. The inferences to be drawn from these sounds were so momentous that I scarcely breathed as I waited for the door to open.

I was standing where I could look directly out into the corridor when the door was opened.

I heard the lock click. Slowly the door swung in upon its hinges; and there, distinctly visible, were two men of flesh and blood. In conformation they were quite human. Their skins were very fair and white, and in strange contrast were their blue hair and blue eyebrows. They wore short close-fitting skirts of heavy gold mesh and breastplates similarly fabricated of gold. For weapons, each wore a long sword and a dagger. Their features were strong, their expressions stern and somewhat forbidding.

I noted all these things in the few moments that the door remained open. I saw both men glance at me and at Umka, and I was quite sure that neither of them was aware of the fact that they were quite visible to me. Had they known it, I am sure that their

facial expressions would have betrayed the fact.

I was tremendously delighted to find that I had been able to throw off the strange spell that had been cast upon me; and after they had gone, I told Umka that I had been able to both see and hear them.

He asked me to describe them; and when I had done so, he agreed that I had told the truth.

"Sometimes people imagine things," he said, in explanation of his seeming doubt as to my veracity.

The next day, in the middle of the forenoon, I heard a considerable commotion in the corridor and on the stairway leading to our prison. Presently the door was opened and fully twenty-five men filed into the room.

As I saw them, a plan occurred to me that I thought might possibly give me an advantage over these people if an opportunity to escape presented itself later on; and therefore I pretended that I did not see them. When looking in their direction, I focused my eyes beyond them; but to lessen the difficulty of this playacting I sought to concentrate my attention on Umka, whom they knew to be visible to me.

I regretted that I had not thought of this plan before, in time to have explained it to Umka, for it was very possible that he might inadvertently betray the fact that the Tarids were no longer invisible to me.

Twelve of the men came close to me, just out of reach. One man stood near the door and issued commands; the others approached Umka, ordering him to place his hands behind his back.

Umka backed away and looked questioningly at me. I could see that he was wondering if we might not make a break for liberty.

I tried to look as though I were unaware of the presence of the warriors. I did not wish them to know that I could see them. Looking blankly past them, I turned indifferently around until my back was toward them and I faced Umka; then I winked at him.

I prayed to God that if he didn't know what a wink was some miracle would enlighten him in this instance. As an added precaution, I placed a finger against my lips, enjoining silence.

Umka looked dumb, and fortunately he remained dumb.

"Half of you get the Masena," ordered the officer in charge of the detachment; "the rest of you take the black-haired one. As you can see, he does not know that we are in the room; so he may be surprised and struggle when you touch him. Seize him firmly."

I guess Umka must have thought that I was again under the influence of the hypnotic spell, for he was looking at me blankly when the warriors surrounded and took him in hand.

Then twelve of them leaped upon me. I might have put up a fight, but I saw nothing to be gained by doing so. As a matter of fact, I was anxious to leave this room. I could accomplish nothing while I remained in it; but once out, some whim of Fate might present an opportunity to me; so I did not struggle much, but pretended that I was startled when they seized me.

They then led us from the room and down the long series of stairways up which I had climbed weeks before and finally into the same great throne room through which Zanda, Jat Or, and I had been conducted the morning of our capture. But what a different scene it presented now that I had cast off the hypnotic spell under which I had labored at that time.

No longer was the great room empty, no longer the two throne chairs untenanted; instead the audience chamber was a mass of light and color and humanity.

Men, women, and children lined the wide aisle down which Umka and I were escorted toward the dais upon which stood the two throne chairs. Between solid ranks of warriors, resplendent in gorgeous trappings, our escort marched us to a little open space before the throne.

Congregated there under guard, their hands bound, were Jat Or, Zanda, Ur Jan, another whom I knew must be Gar Nal, and my beloved princess, Dejah Thoris.

"My chieftain!" she exclaimed. "Fate is a little kind in that she has permitted me to see you once again before we die."

"We still live," I reminded her, and she smiled as she recognized this, my long-time challenge to whatever malign fate might seem to threaten me.

Ur Jan's expression revealed his surprise when his eyes fell upon me. "You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I, Ur Jan."

"What are you doing here?"

"One of the pleasures of the trip I am to be robbed of by our captors," I replied.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"The pleasure of killing you, Ur Jan," I replied.

He nodded understandingly, with a wry smile.

My attention was now attracted to the man on the throne. He was demanding that we be silent.

He was a very fat man, with an arrogant expression; and I noted in him those signs of age that are so seldom apparent among the red men of Barsoom. I had also noted similar indications of age among other members of the throng that filled the audience chamber, a fact which indicated that these people did not enjoy the almost perpetual youth of the Martians.

Occupying the throne at the man's side was a young and very beautiful woman. She was gazing at me dreamily through the heavy lashes of her half-closed lids. I could only assume that the woman's attention was attracted to me because of the fact that my skin differed in color from that of my companions as, after leaving Zodanga, I had removed the disguising pigment.

"Splendid!" she whispered, languidly.

"What is that?" demanded the man. "What is splendid?"

She looked up with a start, as one awakened from a dream. "Oh!" she exclaimed nervously; "I said that it would be splendid if you could make them keep still; but how can you if we are invisible and inaudible to them, unless," she shrugged, "you silence them with the sword."

"You know, Ozara," demurred the man, "that we are saving them for the Fire God—we may not kill them now."

The woman shrugged. "Why kill them at all?" she asked. "They look like intelligent creatures. It might be interesting to preserve them."

I turned to my companions. "Can any of you see or hear anything that is going on in this room?" I asked.

"Except for ourselves, I can see no one and hear no one," said Gar

Nal, and the others answered similarly.

"We are all the victims of a form of hypnosis," I explained, "which makes it impossible for us either to see or hear our captors. By the exercise of the powers of your own minds you can free yourselves from this condition. It is not difficult. I succeeded in doing it. If the rest of you are also successful, our chances of escape will be much better, if an opportunity to escape arises.

"Believing that they are invisible to us, they will never be on their guard against us. As a matter of fact, I could, this moment, snatch a sword from the fellow at my side and kill the Jeddak and his Jeddara upon their thrones before anyone could prevent me."

"We cannot work together," said Gar Nal, "while half of us have it in our hearts to kill the other half."

"Let us call a truce on our own quarrels, then," I said, "until we have escaped from these people."

"That is fair," said Gar Nal.

"Do you agree?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"And you, Ur Jan?" I asked.

"It suits me," said the assassin of Zodanga.

"And you?" demanded Gar Nal, looking at Jat Or.

"Whatever the—Vandor commands, I shall do," replied the padwar.

Ur Jan bestowed a quick glance of sudden comprehension upon me. "Ah," he exclaimed; "so you are also Vandor. Now I understand much that I did not understand before. Did that rat of a Rapas know?"

I ignored his question. "And now," I said, "let us raise our hands and swear to abide by this truce until we have all escaped from the Tarids and, further, that each of us will do all in his power to save the others."

Gar Nal, Ur Jan, Jat Or, and I raised our hands to swear.

"The women, too," said Ur Jan; and then Dejah Thoris and Zanda raised their hands, and thus we six swore to fight for one another to the death until we should be free from these enemies.

It was a strange situation, for I had been commissioned to kill Gar

Nal; and Ur Jan had sworn to kill me, while I was intent upon killing him; and Zanda, who hated them both, was but awaiting the opportunity to destroy me when she should learn my identity.

"Come, come," exclaimed the fat man on the throne, irritably, "what are they jabbering about in that strange language? We must silence them; we did not bring them here to listen to them."

"Remove the spell from them," suggested the girl he had called Ozara. "Let them see and hear us. There are only four men among them; they cannot harm us."

"They shall see us and they shall hear us when they are led out to die," replied the man, "and not before."

"I have an idea that the light-skinned man among them can see us and hear us now," said the girl.

"What makes you think so?" demanded the man.

"I sense it when his eyes rest upon mine," she replied dreamily. "Then, too, when you speak, Ul Vas, his eyes travel to your face; and when I speak, they return to mine. He hears us, Ul Vas, and he sees us."

I was indeed looking at the woman as she spoke, and now I realized that I might have difficulty in carrying on my deception; but this time, when the man she had called Ul Vas replied to her, I focused my eyes beyond the girl and did not look at him.

"It is impossible," he said. "He can neither see nor hear us." Then he looked down at the officer in command of the detachment that had brought us from our cells to the audience chamber. "Zamak," he demanded, "what do you think? Can this creature either see or hear us?"

"I think not, All-highest," replied the man. "When we went to fetch him, he asked this Masena, who was imprisoned with him, if there were anyone in the room, although twenty-five of us were all about him."

"I thought you were wrong," said Ul Vas to his jeddara; "you are always imagining things."

The girl shrugged her shapely shoulders and turned away with a bored yawn, but presently her eyes came back to me; and though I tried not to meet them squarely thereafter, I was aware during all the rest of the time that I was in the audience chamber that she was

watching me.

"Let us proceed," said Ul Vas.

Thereupon an old man stepped to the front and placed himself directly before the throne. "All-highest," he intoned in a sing-song voice, "the day is good, the occasion is good, the time has come. We bring before you, most august son of the Fire God, seven enemies of the Tarids. Through you, your father speaks, letting his people know his wishes. You have talked with the Fire God, your father. Tell us, All-highest, if these offerings look good in his eyes; make known to us his wishes, almighty one."

Ever since we had come into the audience chamber, Ul Vas had been inspecting us carefully; and especially had his attention been centered upon Dejah Thoris and Zanda. Now he cleared his throat.

"My father, the Fire God, wishes to know who these enemies are," he said.

"One of them," replied the old man who had spoken before, and whom I took to be a priest, "is a Masena that your warriors captured while he was hunting outside our walls. The other six are strange creatures. We know not from whence they came. They arrived in two unheard-of contraptions that moved through the air like birds, though they had no wings. In each of these were two men and a woman.

"They alighted inside our walls; but from whence they came or why, we do not know, though doubtless it was their intention to do us harm, as is the intention of all men who come to the castle of the Tarids. As you will note, All-highest, five of these six have red skins, while the sixth had a skin only a little darker than our own. He seems to be of a different race, with his white skin, his black hair, and his grey eyes. These things we know and nothing more. We await the wishes of the Fire God from the lips of his son, Ul Vas."

The man on the throne pursed his lips, as though in thought, while his eyes travelled again along the line of prisoners facing him, lingering long upon Dejah Thoris and Zanda. Presently, he spoke.

"My father, the Fire God, demands that the Masena and the four strange men be destroyed in his honor at this same hour, after he has encircled Ladan seven times."

There were a few moments of expectant silence after he had ceased speaking—a silence that was finally broken by the old priest.

"And the women, All-highest?" he asked; "what are the wishes of the Fire God, your father, in relation to them?"

"The Fire God, to show his great love," replied the jeddak, "has presented the two women to his son, Ul Vas to do with as he chooses."

Chapter 19

OZARA

Life is sweet; and when I heard the words of doom fall from the lips of the jeddak, Ul Vas, the words that condemned five of us to die on the seventh day, I must naturally have experienced some depressing reaction; but I was not conscious of it, in view of the far greater mental perturbation induced by the knowledge that Dejah Thoris's fate was to be worse than death.

I was glad that she was mercifully deaf to what I had heard. It could not help her to know the fate that was being reserved for her, and it could only cause her needless anguish had she heard the death sentence pronounced upon me.

All my companions, having seen nothing and heard nothing, stood like dumb cattle before the throne of their cruel judge. To them it was only an empty chair; for me it held a creature of flesh and blood—a mortal whose vitals the point of a keen blade might reach.

Again Ul Vas was speaking. "Remove them now," he commanded. "Confine the men in the Turquoise Tower, and take the women to the Tower of Diamonds."

I thought then to leap upon him and strangle him with my bare hands, but my better judgment told me that that would not save Dejah Thoris from the fate for which she was being reserved. It could only result in my own death, and thus would be removed her greatest, perhaps her only, hope of eventual succor; and so I went

quietly, as they led me away with my fellow-prisoners, my last memory of the audience chamber being the veiled gaze of Ozara, Jeddara of the Tarids.

Umka and I were not returned to the cell in which we had previously been incarcerated; but were taken with Jat Or, Gar Nal, and Ur Jan to a large room in the Turquoise Tower.

We did not speak until the door had closed behind the escort that had been invisible to all but Umka and myself. The others seemed mystified; I could read it in the puzzled expressions upon their faces.

"What was it all about, Vandor?" demanded Jat Or. "Why did we stand there in silence in that empty chamber before those vacant thrones?"

"There was no silence," I replied; "and the room was crowded with people. The Jeddak and his Jeddara sat upon the thrones that seemed vacant to you, and the Jeddak passed the sentence of death upon all of us—we are to die on the seventh day."

"And the princess and Zanda, too?" he demanded.

I shook my head. "No, unfortunately, no."

"Why do you say unfortunately?" he asked, puzzled "Because they would prefer death to what is in store for them. The Jeddak, Ul Vas, is keeping them for himself."

Jat Or scowled. "We must do something," he said; "we must save them."

"I know it," I replied; "but how?"

"You have given up hope?" he demanded. "You will go to your death calmly, knowing what is in store for them?"

"You know me better than that, Jat Or," I said. "I am hoping that something will occur that will suggest a plan of rescue; although I see no hope at present, I am not hopeless. If no opportunity occurs before, then in the last moment, I shall at least avenge her, if I cannot save her; for I have an advantage over these people that they do not know I possess."

"What is that?" he asked.

"They are neither invisible nor inaudible to me," I replied.

He nodded. "Yes, I had forgotten," he said; "but it seemed

impossible that you could see and hear where there was nothing to be seen nor heard."

"Why are they going to kill us?" demanded Gar Nal, who had overheard my conversation with Jat Or.

"We are to be offered as sacrifices to the Fire God whom they worship," I replied.

"The Fire God?" demanded Ur Jan. "Who is he?"

"The sun," I explained.

"But how could you understand their language?" asked Gar Nal. "It cannot be possible that they speak the same tongue that is spoken upon Barsoom."

"No," I replied, "they do not; but Umka, with whom I have been imprisoned ever since we were captured, has taught me the language of the Tarids."

"What are Tarids?" asked Jat Or.

"It is the name of the people in whose power we are," I explained.

"What is their name for Thuria?" asked Gar Nal.

"I am not sure," I replied; "but I will ask Umka. Umka," I said, in his own language, "What does the word, Ladan, mean?"

"That is the name of this world we live on," he replied. "You heard Ul Vas say that we should die when the Fire God had encircled Ladan seven times."

We Barsoornians fell into a general conversation after this, and I had an opportunity to study Gar Nal and Ur Jan more carefully.

The former was, like most Martians, of indeterminate age. He was not of such extreme age that he commenced to show it, as did Fal Sivas. Gar Nal might have been anywhere from a hundred to a thousand years old. He had a high forehead and rather thin hair for a Martian, and there was nothing peculiarly distinctive about his features, except his eyes. I did not like them; they were crafty, deceitful, and cruel.

Ur Jan, whom of course I had seen before, was just what one might have expected—a burly, brutal fighting man of the lowest type; but of the two, I thought then that I should have trusted Ur Jan farther than Gar Nal.

It seemed strange to me to be confined here in such small

quarters with two such bitter enemies; but I realized, as they must have also, that it would profit us nothing to carry on our quarrel under such circumstances, whereas if an opportunity to escape presented itself, four men who could wield swords would have a very much better chance to effect the liberty of all than if there were only two of us. There would not have been more than two, had we dared to continue our quarrel; for at least two of us, and possibly three, must have died in order to insure peace.

Umka seemed rather neglected as we four talked in our own tongue. He and I had grown to be on very friendly terms, and I counted on him to assist us if an opportunity arose whereby we might attempt escape. I was therefore particularly anxious that he remain friendly, and so I drew him into the conversation occasionally, acting as interpreter for him.

For days, day after day, I had watched Umka play with the hapless creatures that were brought to him for his food, so that the sight no longer affected me; but when the food was brought us this day, the Barsoomians watched the Masena in fascinated horror; and I could see that Gar Nal grew actually to fear the man.

Shortly after we had completed our meal, the door opened again and several warriors entered. Zamak, the officer who had conducted Umka and me to the audience chamber, was again in command.

Only Umka and I could see that anyone had entered the room; and I, with difficulty, pretended that I was not conscious of the fact.

"There he is," said Zamak, pointing to me; "fetch him along."

The soldiers approached and seized my arms on either side; then they hustled me toward the door.

"What is it?" cried Jat Or. "What has happened to you?" he shouted. "Where are you going?" The door was still ajar, and he saw that I was headed toward it.

"I do not know where I am going, Jat Or," I replied. "They are taking me away again."

"My prince, my prince," he cried, and sprang after me, as though to drag me back; but the soldiers hustled me out of the chamber, and the door was slammed in Jat Or's face between us.

"It's a good thing these fellows can't see us," remarked one of the warriors escorting me. "I think we should have had a good fight on

our hands just now, had they been able to."

"I think this one could put up a good fight," said one of the fellows who was pushing me along; "the muscles in his arms are like bands of silver."

"Even the best of men can't fight antagonists that are invisible to them," remarked another.

"This one did pretty well in the courtyard the day that we captured him; he bruised a lot of the Jeddak's guard with his bare hands, and killed two of them."

This was the first intimation that I had had any success whatsoever in that encounter, and it rather pleased me. I could imagine how they would feel if they knew that I could not only see them but hear them and understand them.

They were so lax, because of their fancied security, that I could have snatched a weapon from almost any of them; and I know that I should have given a good account of myself, but I could not see how it would avail either me or my fellow-prisoners.

I was conducted to a part of the palace that was entirely different from any portion that I had hitherto seen. It was even more gorgeous in its lavish and luxurious decorations and appointments than the splendid throne room.

Presently we came to a doorway before which several warriors stood on guard.

"We have come, as was commanded," said Zamak, "and brought the white-skinned prisoner with us."

"You are expected," replied one of the guardsmen; "you may enter," and he threw open the large double doors.

Beyond them was an apartment of such exquisite beauty and richness that, in my poor vocabulary, I find no words to describe it. There were hangings in colors unknown to earthly eyes, against a background of walls that seemed to be of solid ivory, though what the material was of which they were composed, I did not know. It was rather the richness and elegance of the room's appointments that made it seem so beautiful, for after all, when I come to describe it, I find that, in a sense, simplicity was its dominant note.

There was no one else in the room when we entered. My guard led me to the center of the floor and halted.

Presently a door in the opposite side of the room opened, and a woman appeared.

She was a very good-looking young woman. Later I was to learn that she was a slave.

"You will wait in the corridor, Zamak," she said; "the prisoner will follow me."

"What, alone, without a guard?" demanded Zamak in surprise.

"Such are my commands," replied the girl.

"But how can he follow you," asked Zamak, "when he can neither see nor hear us; and if he could hear us, he could not understand us?"

"I will lead him," she replied.

As she approached me, the soldiers relinquished their grasp upon my arms; and taking one of my hands, she led me from the apartment.

The room into which I was now conducted, though slightly smaller, was far more beautiful than the other. However, I did not immediately take note of its appointments, my attention being immediately and wholly attracted by its single occupant.

I am not easily surprised; but in this instance I must confess that I was when I recognized the woman reclining upon a divan, and watching me intently through long lashes, as Ozara, Jeddara of the Tarids.

The slave girl led me to the center of the room and halted. There she waited, looking questioningly at the Jeddara; while I, recalling that I was supposed to be deaf and blind to these people, sought to focus my gaze beyond the beautiful, empress whose veiled eyes seemed to read my very soul.

"You may retire, Ulah," she said presently.

The slave girl bowed low and backed from the room.

For several moments after she departed, no sound broke the silence of the room; but always I felt the eyes of Ozara upon me.

Presently she laughed, a silvery musical laugh. "What is your name?" she demanded.

I pretended that I did not hear her, as I found occupation for my eyes in examination of the beauties of the chamber. It appeared to

be the boudoir of the empress, and it made a lovely setting for her unquestionable loveliness.

"Listen," she said, presently; "you fooled Ul Vas and Zamak and the High Priest and all the rest of them; but you did not fool me. I will admit that you have splendid control, but your eyes betrayed you. They betrayed you in the audience chamber; and they betrayed you again just now as you entered this room, just as I knew they would betray you. They showed surprise when they rested upon me, and that can mean only one thing; that you saw and recognized me.

"I knew, too, in the audience chamber, that you understood what was being said. You are a highly intelligent creature, and the changing lights in your eyes reflected your reaction to what you heard in the audience chamber.

"Let us be honest with one another, you and I, for we have more in common than you guess. I am not unfriendly to you. I understand why you think it to your advantage to conceal the fact that you can see and hear us; but I can assure you that you will be no worse off if you trust me, for I already know that we are neither invisible nor inaudible to you."

I could not fathom what she meant by saying we had much in common, unless it were merely a ruse to lure me into an admission that I could both see and hear the Tarids; yet on the other hand, I could see no reason to believe that either she or the others would profit by this knowledge. I was absolutely in their power, and apparently it made little difference whether I could see and hear them or not. Furthermore, I was convinced that this girl was extremely clever and that I could not deceive her into believing that she was invisible to me. On the whole, I saw no reason to attempt to carry the deception further with her; and so I looked her squarely in the eyes and smiled.

"I shall be honored by the friendship of the Jeddara, Ozara," I said.

"There!" she exclaimed; "I knew that I was right."

"Yet perhaps you had a little doubt."

"If I did, it is because you are a past master in the art of deception."

"I felt that the lives and liberty of my companions and myself might depend upon my ability to keep your people from knowing

that I can see and understand them."

"You do not speak our language very well," she said. "How did you learn it?"

"The Masena with whom I was imprisoned taught me it," I explained.

"Tell me about yourself," she demanded; "your name, your country, the strange contrivances in which you came to the last stronghold of the Tarids, and your reason for coming."

"I am John Carter," I replied, "Prince of the house of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium."

"Helium?" she questioned. "Where is Helium? I never heard of it."

"It is on another world," I explained, "on Barsoom, the great planet that you call your larger moon."

"You are, then, a prince in your own country?" she said. "I thought as much. I am seldom mistaken in my estimate of people. The two women and one of the other men among your companions are well-bred," she continued; "the other two men are not. One of them, however, has a brilliant mind, while the other is a stupid lout, a low brute of a man."

I could not but smile at her accurate appraisal of my companions. Here, indeed, was a brilliant woman. If she really cared to befriend me, I felt that she might accomplish much for us; but I did not allow my hopes to rise too high, for after all she was the mate of Ul Vas, the Jeddak who had condemned us to death.

"You have read them accurately, Jeddara," I told her.

"And you," she continued; "you are a great man in your own world. You would be a great man in any world; but you have not told me why you came to our country."

"The two men that you last described abducted a princess of the reigning house of my country."

"She must be the very beautiful one," mused Ozara.

"Yes," I said. "With the other man and the girl, I pursued them in another ship. Shortly after we reached Ladan, we saw their ship in the courtyard of your castle. We landed beside it to rescue the princess and punish her abductors. It was then that your people captured us."

"Then you did not come to harm us?" she asked.

"Certainly not," I replied. "We did not even know of your existence."

She nodded. "I was quite sure that you intended us no harm," she said, "for enemies would never have placed themselves thus absolutely in our power; but I could not convince Ul Vas and the others."

"I appreciate your belief in me," I said; "but I cannot understand why you have taken this interest in me, an alien and a stranger."

She contemplated me in silence for a moment, her beautiful eyes momentarily dreamy.

"Perhaps it is because we have so much in common," she said; "and again perhaps because of a force that is greater than all others and that seizes and dominates us without our volition."

She paused and regarded me intently, and then she shook her head impatiently.

"The thing that we have in common," she said, "is that we are both prisoners in the castle of Ul Vas. The reason that I have taken this interest in you, you would understand if you are one-tenth as intelligent as I gave you credit for."

Chapter 20

WE ATTEMPT ESCAPE

Ozara may have overestimated my intelligence, but she underestimated my caution.

I could not admit that I understood the inference that I was supposed to draw from what she had said to me. As a matter of fact, the implication was so preposterous that at first I was inclined to believe that it was a ruse intended to trap me into some sort of an admission of ulterior designs upon her people, after she had wholly won my confidence; and so I sought to ignore the possible confession in her final statement by appearing to be dumbfounded by her first statement, which really was a surprise to me.

"You, a prisoner?" I demanded. "I thought that you were the Jeddara of the Tarids."

"I am," she said, "but I am no less a prisoner."

"But are not these your people?" I asked.

"No," she replied; "I am a Domnian. My country, Domnia, lies far away across the mountains that lie beyond the forest that surrounds the castle of Ul Vas."

"And your people married you to Ul Vas, Jeddak of the Tarids?" I asked.

"No," she replied; "he stole me from them. My people do not know what has become of me. They would never willingly have sent me to the court of Ul Vas, nor would I remain here, could I escape. Ul Vas is a beast. He changes his jeddaras often. His agents are

constantly searching other countries for beautiful young women.

"When they find one more beautiful than I, I shall go the way of my predecessors; but I think that he has found one to his liking already, and that my days are numbered."

"You think that his agents have found another more beautiful than you?" I asked; "it seems incredible."

"Thank you for the compliment," she said "but his agents have not found another more beautiful than I. Ul Vas has found her himself. In the audience chamber, did you not see him looking at your beautiful compatriot? He could scarcely keep his eyes from her, and you will recall that her life was spared."

"So was the life of the girl, Zanda," I reminded her. "Is he going to take her also to be his jeddara?"

"No, he may only have one at a time," replied Ozara. The girl whom you call Zanda is for the High Priest. It is thus that Ul Vas propitiates the gods."

"If he takes this other woman," I said, "she will kill him."

"But that will not help me," said Ozara.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because while one jeddara lives, he cannot take another," she explained.

"You will be destroyed?" I asked.

"I shall disappear," she replied. "Strange things happen in the castle of Ul Vas, strange and terrible things."

"I commence to understand why you sent for me," I said; "you would like to escape; and you think if you can help us to escape, we will take you with us."

"You are commencing to understand at least a part of my reasons," she said. "The rest," she added, "I shall see that you learn in time."

"You think there is a chance for us to escape?" I asked.

"Just a bare chance," she said; "but inasmuch as we are to die anyway, there is no chance that we may not take."

"Have you any plans?"

"We might escape in the ship, the one that is still in the courtyard."

Now I was interested. "One of the ships is still in the courtyard?" I demanded.

"Only one? They have not destroyed it?"

"They would have destroyed it, but they are afraid of it; they are afraid to go near it. When you were captured, two of Ul Vas's warriors entered one of the ships, whereupon it immediately flew away with them. It did not fly away before the first one who had entered it had called back to his companion that it was deserted. Now they think that these ships are under a magic spell, and they will not go near the one that lies in the courtyard."

"Do you know what became of the other ship?" I asked. "Do you know where it went?"

"It lies in the sky, far above the castle. It just floats there, as though it were waiting—waiting for something, we know not what. Ul Vas is afraid of it.

"That is one reason why you have not been destroyed before. He was waiting to see what the ship would do; and he was also waiting to screw up his courage to a point where he might order your destruction, for Ul Vas is a great coward."

"Then you think that there is a chance of our reaching the ship?" I asked.

"There is a chance," she said. "I can hide you here in my apartment until nightfall, and the castle sleeps. Then if we can pass the guard at the outer doorway and reach the courtyard, we should succeed. It is worth trying, but you may have to fight your way past the guard. Are you skilled with the sword?"

"I think that I can give a good account of myself," I replied, "but how are we to get the rest of my party into the courtyard?"

"Only you and I are going," she said.

I shook my head. "I cannot go unless all my people go with me."

She eyed me with sudden suspicion. "Why not?" she demanded. "You are in love with one of those women; you will not go without her." Her tone was tinged with resentment; it was the speech of a jealous woman.

If I were to effect the escape of the others, and especially of Dejah Thoris, I must not let her know the truth; so I thought quickly, and two good reasons occurred to me why she and I could not depart

alone.

"It is a point of honor in the country from which I come," I told her, "that a man never deserts his comrades. For that reason, I could not, in honor, leave without them; but there is another even more potent reason."

"What is that?" she asked.

"The ship that remains in the courtyard belongs to my enemies, the two men who abducted the princess from my country. My ship is the one that floats above the castle. I know nothing at all about the mechanism of their ship. Even if we succeeded in reaching it I could not operate it."

She studied this problem for a while, and then she looked up at me. "I wonder if you are telling me the truth," she said.

"Your life depends upon your believing me," I replied, "and so does mine, and so do the lives of all my companions."

She considered this in silence for a moment, and then with a gesture of impatience she said, "I do not know how we can get your friends out into the courtyard and to the ship."

"I think I know how we may escape," I said, "if you will help us."

"How is that?" she demanded.

"If you can get me tools with which we can cut the bars to the windows of their prison cells, and also describe exactly the location of the room in which the girls are imprisoned, I am sure that I can be successful."

"If I did these things, then you could escape without me," she said suspiciously.

"I give you my word, Ozara, that if you do as I ask, I shall not leave without you."

"What else do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Can you gain entrance to the room where the princess and Zanda are imprisoned?"

"Yes, I think that I can do that," she replied, "unless Ul Vas should realize that I suspected his intention and might think that I intended to kill the women; but I am not so sure that I can get the tools with which you may cut the bars to the windows of your prison. I can get them," she corrected herself, "but I do not know how I can get

them to you."

"If you could send some food to me, you might conceal a file or saw in the jar with the food," I suggested.

"Just the thing!" she exclaimed; "I can send Ulah to you with a jar of food."

"And how about the bars on the windows of the girls' prison?" I asked.

"They are in the Diamond Tower," she replied, "very high. There are no bars on their windows because no one could escape from the Diamond Tower in that way. There are always guards at its base, for it is the tower in which are the Jeddak's quarters; so if you are planning on your women escaping through a window, you might as well abandon the idea at once."

"I think not," I replied. "If my plan works, they can escape with even greater ease from the Diamond Tower than from the courtyard."

"But how about you and the other men of your party? Even if you are able to lower yourselves from the window of your cell, you will never be able to reach the Diamond Tower to insure our escape."

"Leave that to me," I said; "have confidence in me, and I think that if you do your part, we shall all be able to escape."

"Tonight?" she asked.

"No, I think not," I said; "we had better wait until tomorrow night, for we do not know how long it will take to sever the bars of our window. Perhaps you had better send me back now and smuggle the tools to me as soon thereafter as possible."

She nodded. "You are right."

"Just a moment," I said. "How am I to know the Tower of Diamonds? How am I to find it?"

She appeared puzzled. "It is the central and loftiest tower of the castle," she explained, "but I do not know how you will reach it without a guide and many fighting men."

"Leave that to me, but you must help guide me to the room where the two women are imprisoned."

"How can I do that?" she demanded.

"When you reach their room, hang a colored scarf from a window

there— a red scarf."

"How can you see that from inside the castle?" she demanded.

"Never mind; if my plan works, I shall find it. And now, please send me away."

She struck a gong hanging near her and the slave girl, Ulah, entered the apartment. "Take the prisoner back to Zamak," she instructed, "and have him returned to his cell."

Ulah took me by the hand and led me from the presence of the Jeddara, through the adjoining apartment and into the corridor beyond, where Zamak and the guards were waiting. There she turned me over to the warriors who conducted me back to the room in the Turquoise Tower, where my companions were imprisoned.

Jat Or voiced an exclamation of relief when he saw me enter the room. "When they took you away, my prince, I thought that I should never see you again; but now fate is growing kinder to me. She has just given me two proofs of her returning favor—I have you back again, and when the door opened I saw the Tarids who returned with you."

"You could see them?" I exclaimed.

"I could see them and hear them," he replied.

"And I, too," said Gar Nal.

"How about you, Ur Jan?" I asked, for the more of us who could see them, the better chance we would have in the event that there was any fighting during our attempt to rescue the women and escape.

Ur Jan shook his head gloomily. "I could see nothing or hear nothing," he said.

"Don't give up," I urged; "you must see them. Persevere, and you shall see them."

"Now," I said, turning to Gar Nal, "I have some good news. Our ships are safe; yours still lies in the courtyard. They are afraid to approach it."

"And yours?" he asked.

"It floats in the sky, high above the castle."

"You brought others with you from Barsoom?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"But there must be somebody aboard the ship, or it could not get up there and remain under control."

"There is someone aboard it," I replied.

He looked puzzled. "But you just said that you brought no one with you," he challenged.

"There are two Tarid warriors aboard it."

"But how can they handle it? What can they know about the intricate mechanism of Fal Sivas's craft?"

"They know nothing about it and cannot handle it."

"Then how in the name of Issus did it get up there?" he demanded.

"That is something that you need not know, Gar Nal," I told him. "The fact is, that it is there."

"But what good will it do us, hanging up there in the sky?"

"I think that I can get it, when the time comes," I said, although, as a matter of fact, I was not positive that I could control the ship through the mechanical brain at so great a distance. "I am not so much worried about my ship, Gar Nal, as I am about yours. We should recover it, for after we escape from this castle, our truce is off; and it would not be well for us to travel on the same ship."

He acquiesced with a nod, but I saw his eyes narrow craftily. I wondered if that expression reflected some treacherous thought; but I passed the idea off with a mental shrug, as really it did not make much difference what Gar Nal was thinking as long as I could keep my eyes on him until I had Dejah Thoris safely aboard my own craft.

Ur Jan was sitting on a bench, glaring into space; and I knew that he was concentrating his stupid brain in an effort to cast off the hypnotic spell under which the Tarids had placed him. Umka lay curled up on a rug, purring contentedly. Jat Or stood looking out of one of the windows.

The door opened, and we all turned toward it. I saw Ulah, the Jeddara's slave, bearing a large earthen jar of food. She set it down upon the floor inside the door, and stepping back into the corridor, closed and fastened the door after her.

I walked quickly to the jar and picked it up; and as I turned back toward the others, I saw Ur Jan standing wide-eyed staring at the

door.

"What's the matter, Ur Jan?" I asked. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I saw her!" he exclaimed. "I saw her. Ghost or no ghost, I saw her."

"Good!" ejaculated Jat Or; "now we are all free from that damnable spell."

"Give me a good sword," growled Ur Jan; "and well soon be free of the castle, too."

"We've got to get out of this room first," Gar Nal reminded him.

"I think we have the means of escape here, in this jar," I told them. "Come, we might as well eat the food, as long as we have it, and see what we find in the bottom of the jar."

The others gathered around me, and we started to empty the jar in the most pleasurable fashion; nor had we gone deep into it before I discovered three files, and with these we immediately set to work upon the bars of one of our windows.

"Don't cut them all the way through," I cautioned; "just weaken three of them so that we can pull them aside when the time arrives."

The metal of which the bars were constructed was either some element unknown upon Earth or Barsoom. or an equally mysterious alloy. It was very hard. In fact, it seemed at first that it was almost as hard as our files; but at last they commenced to bite into it, yet I saw that it was going to be a long, hard job.

We worked upon those bars all that night and all of the following day.

When slaves brought our food, two of us stood looking out of the window, our hands grasping the bars so as to cover up the evidence of our labors; and thus we succeeded in finishing the undertaking without being apprehended.

Night fell. The time was approaching when I might put to trial the one phase of my plan that was the keystone upon which the success of the entire adventure must rest. If it failed, all our work upon the bars would be set for naught, our hopes of escape practically blasted. I had not let the others know what I purposed attempting, and I did not now acquaint them with the doubts and

fears that assailed me.

Ur Jan was at the window looking out. "We can pull these bars away whenever we wish," he said, "but I do not see what good that is going to do us. If we fastened all our harnesses together, they would not reach to the castle roof below us. It looks to me as though we had had all our work for nothing."

"Go over there and sit down," I told him, "and keep still. All of you keep still; do not speak or move until I tell you to."

Of them all, only Jat Or could have guessed what I purposed attempting, yet they all did as I had bid them.

Going to the window, I searched the sky; but I could see nothing of our craft.

Nevertheless, I sought to concentrate my thoughts upon the metallic brain wherever it might be. I directed it to drop down and approach the window of the tower where I stood. Never before in my life, I think, had I so concentrated my mind upon a single idea. There seemed to be a reaction that I could feel almost as definitely as when I tensed a muscle. Beads of cold sweat stood our upon my forehead.

Behind me the room was as silent as the grave; and through the open window where I stood, no sound came from the sleeping castle below me.

The slow seconds passed, dragging into a seeming eternity of time. Could it be that the brain had passed beyond the sphere of my control? Was the ship lost to me forever? These thoughts assailed me as my power of concentration weakened. My mind was swept into a mad riot of conflicting hopes and doubts, fears and sudden swift assurances of success that faded into despond as rapidly as they had grown out of nothing.

And then, across the sky I saw a great black hulk moving slowly toward me out of the night.

For just an instant the reaction left me weak; but I soon regained control of myself and pulled aside the three bars that we had cut.

The others, who had evidently been watching the window from where they either sat or stood, now pressed forward. I could hear smothered exclamations of surprise, relief, elation. Turning quickly, I cautioned them to silence.

I directed the brain to bring the ship close to the window; then I turned again to my companions.

"There are two Tarid warriors aboard her," I said. "If they found the water and food which she carried, they are still alive; and there is no reason to believe that starving men would not find it. We must therefore prepare ourselves for a fight. Each of these men, no doubt, is armed with a long sword and a dagger. We are unarmed. We shall have to overcome them with our bare hands."

I turned to Ur Jan. "When the door is opened, two of us must leap into the cabin simultaneously on the chance that we may take them by surprise. Will you go first with me, Ur Jan?"

He nodded and a crooked smile twisted his lips. "Yes," he said, "and it will be a strange sight to see Ur Jan and John Carter fighting side by side."

"At least we should put up a good fight," I said.

"It is too bad," he sighed, "that those two Tarids will never have the honor of knowing who killed them."

"Jat Or, you and Gar Nal follow immediately behind Ur Jan and me." And then, in his own language, I told Umka to board the ship immediately after Jat Or and Gar Nal. "And if the fighting is not all over," I told him, "you will know what to do when you see the two Tarid warriors." His upper mouth stretched in one of his strange grins, and he purred contentedly.

I stepped to the sill of the window, and Ur Jan clambered to my side. The hull of the craft was almost scraping the side of the building; the doorway was only a foot from the sill on which we stood.

"Ready, Ur Jan," I whispered, and then I directed the brain to draw the doors aside as rapidly as possible.

Almost instantly, they sprang apart; and in the same instant Ur Jan and I sprang into the cabin. Behind us, came our three companions. In the gloom of the interior, I saw two men facing us; and without waiting to give either of them a chance to draw, I hurled myself at the legs of the nearer.

He crashed to the floor, and before he could draw his dagger I seized both his wrists and pinioned him on his back.

I did not see how Ur Jan handled his man; but a moment later,

with the assistance of Jat Or and Umka, we had disarmed them both.

Ur Jan and Gar Nal wanted to kill them offhand, but that I would not listen to.

I can kill a man in a fair fight without a single qualm of conscience; but I cannot kill a defenseless man in cold blood, even though he be my enemy.

As a precautionary measure, we bound and gagged them.

"What now?" demanded Gar Nal. "How are you going to get the women?"

"First, I am going to try and get your ship," I replied, "for even if we extend our truce, we shall stand a better chance of returning to Barsoom if we have both ships in our possession, as something might happen to one of them."

"You are right," he said; "and, too, I should hate to lose my ship. It is the fruit of a lifetime of thought and study and labor."

I now caused the ship to rise and cruise away until I thought that it was out of sight of the castle. I adopted this course merely as a strategy to throw the Tarids off our track in the event that any of the guards had seen the ship maneuvering among the towers; but when we had gone some little distance, I dropped low and approached the castle again from the side where Gar Nal's ship lay in the courtyard.

I kept very low above the trees of the forest and moved very slowly without lights. Just beyond the castle wall, I brought the ship to a stop and surveyed the courtyard just ahead and below us.

Plainly I saw the outlines of Gar Nal's ship, but nowhere upon that side of the castle was there any sign of a guard.

This seemed almost too good to be true, and in a whisper I asked Umka if it could be possible that the castle was unguarded at night.

"There are guards within the castle all night," he said, "and upon the outside of the Tower of Diamonds, but these are to guard Ul Vas against assassination by his own people. They do not fear that any enemy will come from beyond the walls at night, for none has ever attacked except by day. The forests of Ladan are full of wild beasts; and if a body of men were to enter them at night, the beasts would set up such a din of howling and roaring that the Tarids would be

warned in ample time to defend themselves; so you see, the beasts of the forest are all the guards they need."

Thus assured that there was no one in the courtyard, I took the ship across the wall and dropped it to the ground beside Gar Nal's.

Quickly I gave my instructions for what was to follow. "Gar Nal," I said, "you will go aboard your ship and pilot it, following me. We are going to the window of the room where the girls are confined. As I draw in and stop at their window, both the doors in the sides of my ship will be open. Open the door on the port side of your ship and place it alongside mine, so that if it is necessary you can cross through my ship and enter the room where the women are confined. We may need all the help that we have, if the women are well guarded."

Chapter 21

IN THE TOWER OF DIAMONDS

Vague misgivings disturbed me as I saw Gar Nal enter his ship. They seemed a premonition of disaster, of tragedy; but I realized that they were based upon nothing more substantial than my natural dislike for the man, and so I sought to thrust them aside and devote my thoughts to the business in hand.

The night was dark. Neither Mars nor Cluros had risen. It was, indeed, because of the fact that I knew neither of them would be in the sky that I had chosen this hour for my attempt to rescue Dejah Thoris and her companion.

Presently I heard the motors of Gar Nal's ship, which we had decided should be the signal that he was ready to start. Leaving the ground, I rose from the courtyard, crossed the wall and set a course away from the city. This I held until I felt that we were out of sight of any possible watcher who might have discovered us. Trailing us was the dark hulk of Gar Nal's ship.

In a wide spiral, I rose and circled back to the opposite side of the castle; and then, approaching it more closely, I picked out the lofty Tower of Diamonds.

Somewhere in that gleaming shaft were Dejah Thoris and Zanda; and if Ozara had not betrayed me and if no accident had befallen her plan, the Jeddara of the Tarids was with them.

There had been moments when I had been somewhat concerned as to the honesty and loyalty of Ozara. If she had spoken the truth,

then there was every reason why she should wish to escape from the clutches of Ul Vas. However, she might not be so enthusiastic about the escape of Dejah Thoris and Zanda.

I confess that I do not understand women. Some of the things that they do, their mental processes, are often inexplicable to me. Yes, I am a fool with women; yet I was not so stupid that I did not sense something in Ozara's manner toward me, something in the very fact that she had sent for me, that indicated an interest on the part of the Jeddara of the Tarids that might prove inimical to the interests of the Princess of Helium.

Ozara, Jeddara of the Tarids, however, was not the only doubtful factor in the problem which confronted me. I did not trust Gar Nal. I doubt that anyone who had once looked into the man's eyes could trust him. Ur Jan was my avowed enemy.

His every interest demanded that he either betray or destroy me.

Zanda must have learned by this time from Dejah Thoris that I was John Carter, Prince of Helium. That knowledge would, undoubtedly, free her from all sense of obligation to me; and I could not but recall that she had sworn to kill John Carter if ever the opportunity presented itself. This left only Jat Or and Umka upon whom I could depend; and, as a matter of fact, I was not depending too much upon Umka. His intentions might be good enough, but I knew too little of his fighting heart and ability to be able to definitely assure myself that the cat-man of Ladan would prove an important and effective ally.

As these discouraging thoughts were racing through my brain, I was causing the ship to drop slowly toward the Diamond Tower and circle it; and presently I saw a red scarf across the sill of a lighted window.

Silently the ship drew closer. The doors in both sides of the cabin were open to permit Gar Nal to cross from his ship to the window in the tower.

I stood upon the threshold of the port doorway, ready to leap into the room the instant that the ship drew close enough.

The interior of the room beyond the window was not brilliantly lighted, but in the dim illumination I could see the figures of three women, and my heart leaped with renewed hope.

The discovery of the scarlet scarf flying from the window had not

wholly reassured me, as I was fully conscious of the fact that it might have been placed there as a lure; but the presence of the three women in the chamber appeared reasonable evidence that Ozara had carried out her part of the agreement loyally.

As the ship came closer to the sill, I prepared to leap into the room beyond; and just as I jumped I heard a voice raised in alarm and warning far below me at the base of the tower. We had been discovered.

As I alighted from the floor of the chamber, Dejah Thoris voiced a little exclamation of happiness. "My chieftain!" she cried. "I knew that you would come. Wherever they might have taken me, I knew that you would follow."

"To the end of the universe, my Princess," I replied.

The warning cry from below that told me that we had been discovered left no time now for greeting or explanation, nor would either Dejah Thoris or myself reveal to strangers the emotions that were in our breasts. I wanted to take her to my heart, to crush her beautiful body to mine, to cover her lips with kisses; but instead I only said, "Come, we must board the ship at once. The guard below has raised the alarm."

Zanda came and clutched my arm. "I knew you would come, Vandor," she said.

I could not understand her use of that name. Could it be that Dejah Thoris had not told her who I was? Ozara also knew my name. It seemed incredible that she should not have mentioned it when she came to the room to explain to the two women imprisoned there that a rescue had been planned and who was to execute it.

The Jeddara of the Tarids, did not greet me. She scrutinized me beneath narrowed lids through the silky fringe of her long lashes; and as my eyes rested for a moment on hers, I thought that I recognized in her glance a hint of malice; but perhaps that was only my imagination, and certainly I had no time now to analyze or question her emotions.

As I turned toward the window with Dejah Thoris, I was filled with consternation. The ships were gone!

Running to the opening, I looked out; and to the left I saw both crafts moving off into the night.

What had happened to thus wreck my plans in the very instant of success?

The three women shared my consternation. "The ship!" exclaimed Dejah Thoris.

"Where has it gone?" cried Ozara.

"We are lost," said Zanda, quite simply. "I ran hear armed men running up the stairway."

Suddenly I realized what had happened. I had directed the brain to approach the window, but I had not told it to stop. I had jumped, and it had gone on before my companions could follow me; and Gar Nal, not knowing what had occurred, had continued on with it, following me as I had directed.

Instantly, I centered my thoughts upon the mechanical brain and directed it to bring the ship back to the window and stop there. Self-reproach now was useless but I could not help but be cognizant of the fact that my carelessness had jeopardized the safety of my princess and those others who had looked to me for protection.

I could now plainly hear the warriors approaching. They were coming swiftly.

From the window, I could see both ships turning now. Would they reach us before it was too late? I commanded the brain to return at the highest speed compatible with safety. It leaped forward in response to my wishes. The warriors were very close now. I judged that they were approaching the next level below. In another moment they would be at the door.

I carried the long sword of one of the Tarid warriors that we had overpowered in the cabin of the craft, but could a single sword for long prevail over the many that I knew must be coming?

The ships drew closer, Gar Nal's almost abreast of mine. I saw Jat Or and Ur Jan standing in the doorway of Fal Sivas's ship.

"The alarm has been raised and warriors are almost at the door," I called to them. "I will try to hold them off while you get the women aboard."

Even as I spoke, I heard the enemy just outside the door of the chamber. "Stay close to the window," I directed the three women, "and board the boat the moment it touches the sill;" then I crossed the room quickly to the door, the Tarid long sword ready in my

hand.

I had scarcely reached it, when it was thrown open; a dozen warriors crowded in the corridor beyond. The first one to leap into the room leaped full upon the point of my blade. With a single, piercing scream he died; and as I jerked my steel from his heart, he lunged forward at my feet.

In the brief instant that my weapon was thus engaged, three men forced themselves into the room, pushed forward by those behind.

One thrust at me, and another swung a terrific cut at my head. I parried the thrust and dodged the cut, and then my blade clove the skull of one of them.

For a moment I forgot everything in the joy of battle. I felt my lips tense in the fighting smile that is famous in two worlds. Again, as upon so many other fields, my sword seemed inspired; but the Tarids were no mean swordsmen, nor were they cowards. They pushed forward into the room over the bodies of their dead companions.

I think that I could have accounted for them all singlehanded, with such fierce enthusiasm did I throw my whole being into the defense of my princess; but now from below I heard the tramp of many feet and the rattling of accouterments.

Reinforcements were coming!

It had been a glorious fight so far. Six lay dead upon the floor about me; but now the other six were all in the room, yet I would have felt no discouragement had I not heard the thunderous pounding of those many feet leaping rapidly upward from below.

I was engaged with a strapping fellow who sought to push me back, when one of his companions attempted to reach my side and distract my attention, while another edged to my opposite side.

My situation at that moment was embarrassing, to say the least, for the man who engaged me in front was not only a powerful fellow but a splendid swordsman; and then I saw a sword flash at my right and another at my left. Two of my adversaries went down, and in the next instant a quick glance showed me that Ur Jan and Jat Or were fighting at my side.

As the three remaining Tarids bravely leaped in to take the places of their fallen comrades, the van of their reinforcements arrived;

and a perfect avalanche of yelling warriors burst into the apartment.

As I finally succeeded in spitting my antagonist, I snatched a momentary opportunity to glance behind me.

I saw the three women and Umka in the room and Gar Nal standing upon the sill of the window.

"Quick, Gar Nal," I cried, "get the women aboard."

For the next few minutes I was about as busy as I can remember ever having been before in my life. The Tarids were all around us. They had succeeded in encircling us. I was engaged constantly with two or three swordsmen at a time. I could not see what was taking place elsewhere in the room, but my thoughts were always of Dejah Thoris and her safety; and suddenly it occurred to me that if all of us who were fighting there in the room should be destroyed, she would be left in the power of Gar Nal without a defender.

Jat Or was fighting near me. "The princess!" I called to him; "she is alone on the ship with Gar Nal. If we are both killed, she is lost. Go to her at once."

"And leave you, my prince?" he demanded.

"It is not a request, Jat Or," I said; "it is a command."

"Yes, my prince," he replied, and fought his way to the window.

"Help him, Ur Jan," I commanded.

The three of us managed to cut a path for Jat Or to the window, and as we stood with our backs to it, I saw something which filled me with consternation. At one side, struggling in the grip of two warriors, was Ozara, the Jeddara of the Tarids.

"Save me, John Carter," she cried. "Save me, or I shall be killed."

There was nothing else that I could do. No other path would be honorable. Ozara had made it possible for us to escape. Perhaps her deed had already succeeded in saving Dejah Thoris. My own stupidity had placed us in this position, which now had become a definite threat to the life of the Jeddara.

Jat Or, Ur Jan, and I had succeeded in cutting down the warriors that immediately faced us; and the others, probably the least courageous of the band, seemed to hesitate to engage us again immediately.

I turned to my companions. "On board with you, quick," I cried, "and hold the entrance to the ship until I bring the Jeddara aboard."

As I started toward the warriors holding Ozara, I saw Umka at my side. He had given a good account of himself in the fight, although he had carried no sword, which, at the time, I did not understand because there was a plentiful supply of weapons aboard the craft; but later I was to learn that it is not the manner of the Masenas to fight with swords or daggers, with the use of which they are wholly unfamiliar.

I had seen in this encounter how he fought; and I realized that his powerful muscles and the terrible jaws of his lower mouth were adequate weapons even against a swordsman, aided as they were by the catlike agility of the Masena.

Umka had received a number of wounds; and was bleeding profusely, as, in fact, were all of us; but I thought that he looked about finished and ordered him back to the ship. He demurred at first, but finally he went, and I was alone in the room with the remaining Tarids.

I knew that my position was hopeless, but I could not leave to her death this girl who had aided me.

As I sprang forward to attack her captors, I saw another contingent of reinforcements burst into the room.

My case was now, indeed, hopeless.

The newcomers paid no attention to me; they ran straight for the window where the ship lay. If they succeeded in boarding her, the doom of Dejah Thoris would be sealed.

There was only one way in which I could circumvent them, though it definitely spelled the end for me.

The two men holding Ozara were waiting for me to attack them, but I paused long enough to hurl a mental order at the mechanical brain in the nose of Fal Sivas's ship.

I cast a glance back at the craft. Ur Jan and Umka stood in the doorway; Jat Or was not there; but at the very instant that the ship started to move away in obedience to my command, the young padwar sprang into view.

"My prince," he cried, "we have been betrayed. Gar Nal has fled with Dejah Thoris in his own ship."

Then the Tarids were upon me. A blow upon my head sent me down to merciful unconsciousness.

Chapter 22

IN THE DARK CELL

Enveloped in darkness, surrounded by the silence of the grave, I regained consciousness. I was lying on a cold, stone floor; my head ached; and when I felt it with my palms, it was stiff with dried blood; and my hair was matted.

Dizzily, I dragged myself to a sitting posture and then to my feet. Then came realization that I probably was not seriously injured, and I commenced to investigate my surroundings.

Moving cautiously, groping through the darkness with outstretched hands before me, I soon came in contact with a stone wall. This I followed for a short distance, when I discovered a door. It was a very substantial door, and it was securely fastened from the opposite side.

I moved on; I encircled the room and came to the door again. It was a small room, this new cell of mine. It had nothing to offer to either my eyes or to my ears. I commenced to realize the sort of world that the blind and the deaf must live in.

There were left to me then, only the senses of taste and smell and touch.

The first, of course, was useless to me under the circumstances; my nose, at first, identified a stale and musty odor; but presently becoming accustomed to it, it did not react at all. There was left to me then only the sense of touch.

A strong wall broken by a wooden door—this was my world.

I wondered how long they would leave me here. It was like being buried alive. I knew that I must steel my will against the horrible monotony of it, with only the stone wall and that wooden door and my thoughts for company.

My thoughts! They were not pleasant. I thought of Dejah Thoris alone in the power of Gar Nal; I thought of poor Jat Or imprisoned in a ship that he could not control, with Ur Jan, the brutal assassin of Zodanga. I knew what his thoughts must be, knowing nothing of my fate, and feeling his sole responsibility for the safety of Dejah Thoris, whom he was helpless either to protect or avenge.

I thought of poor Zanda, to whom fate had been so unkind, condemned now to almost certain death above this distant satellite.

And Umka. Well, Umka had expected to die; and so he was no worse off now than he would have been had he never met me.

But the bitterest thought of all was that my own carelessness had brought disaster upon those who had looked to me for aid and protection.

Thus, futilely, I added mental torture to the monotony of those dragging hours.

The vault-like hole in which I was incarcerated was chill and damp. I surmised that they had placed me in the pits beneath the castle where no ship could reach me. My muscles were stiff; my blood ran sluggishly through my veins; hopelessness engulfed me.

Presently I realized that if I gave way to my morbid reflections, I should indeed be lost. Again and again I reminded myself that I still lived. I told myself that life was sweet; for so long as it persisted, there was still a chance that I might redeem myself and go out into the world again to serve my princess.

Now I commenced to move around my cell, encircling it several times until I knew its dimensions; and then I trotted to and fro, back and forth, around and around; and like a shadow boxer, I lead and feinted and parried, until at last I had my blood flowing again and felt the warmth of life renewing my vitality and flushing the sediment of foul worry from my brain.

I could not keep this up constantly, and so I sought to find other diversions by counting the stones set in the walls of my cell. I started at the door and moved around to the left. It was not the most entertaining pastime in which I had indulged, but at least

there was a spice of excitement added to it by the thought that I might find some loose stones and possibly uncover an aperture leading to another apartment and to escape. Thus my imagination helped to alleviate the horrors of the darkness and the silence.

I could not, of course, measure time. I did not know how long I had been imprisoned there, but finally I became sleepy. I lay down upon the cold, damp floor.

When I awoke, I did not know how long I had slept; but I was very much refreshed, and so I concluded that I had passed the normal number of hours in rest.

Again, however, I was numb and cold; and once more I set myself to the exercises that would restore my circulation to normal; and as I was thus engaged, I heard sounds beyond the door of my cell.

I stopped and listened. Yes, someone was approaching. I waited, watching in the direction that I knew the door to be; and presently it opened, and a light flared in.

It was a blinding light to one whose eyes had become accustomed to the total darkness of the cell. I had to turn away my head and shield my eyes with my hand.

When I could look again, I saw a single warrior carrying a torch, a bowl of food, and a jug of water.

He had opened the door only wide enough to permit him to pass the receptacles through and set them on the floor of my cell. I saw that a heavy chain prevented the door from opening farther, as well as preventing me from attacking the bearer of my food and escaping.

The fellow raised his torch above his head and looked at me, inserting it through the crack of the door so that it fully illuminated the entire interior of the cell, or at least as high as some heavy wooden beam that spanned the room about twenty feet from the floor.

"So you weren't killed after all," commented the warrior.

"That is more than you can say for some of the others who fought in the Diamond Tower last night," I replied; "or was it last night?"

"No, it was night before last," he said. "It must have been some fight," he added. "I was not there, but the whole castle has been talking about it ever since. Those who fought against you say you

are the greatest swordsman that ever lived. They would like to have you stay here and fight for them instead of against them, but old Ul Vas is so furious that nothing will satisfy him but your death."

"I can imagine that he doesn't feel very kindly toward me," I agreed.

"No, my life on it, he doesn't. It was bad enough letting am his prisoners escape, but planning to take his jeddara with you, phew! By my life, that was something. They say that the reason that you still live is because he hasn't been able to think of any death commensurate with your crime."

"And the Jeddara?" I asked; "what of her?"

"He's got her locked up; she'll be killed, too. I imagine that he is planning to put you both to death at the same time and probably in the same way. It is a shame to kill such a swordsman as you, but I am sure that it is going to be very interesting. I hope that I shall be fortunate enough to see it."

"Yes," I said, "I hope you enjoy it."

"Everyone will enjoy it but you and Ozara," he said, good-naturedly; and then he withdrew the torch, closed and locked the door; and I heard his footsteps receding as he departed.

I groped my way over to the food and water, as I was both hungry and thirsty; and as I ate and drank, I speculated upon what he had told me and upon what I had seen in the light of the flaring torch.

The beams, twenty feet above the floor, intrigued me. Above them there seemed to be nothing but a dark void, as though the ceiling of the cell was much farther above.

As I finished my meal, I determined to investigate what lay above those beams.

On Mars, my earthly muscles permitted me to jump to extraordinary heights. I recalled the calculation that a full-sized earth man on Thuria could jump to a height of 225 feet. I realized, of course, that my size had been reduced, so that in proportion to Thuria I was no larger than I had been upon Barsoom; but I was still certain that my earthly muscles would permit me to jump much higher than any inhabitant of Ladan.

As I prepared to put my plan into practice, I was confronted by

the very serious obstacle which the total darkness presented. I could not see the beams. In jumping for them, I might strike my head squarely against one of them with highly painful, if not fatal, results.

When you cannot see, it is difficult to tell how high you are jumping; but I had no light and no way of making a light; so all I could do was to be as careful as I could and trust to luck.

I tried springing upward a little way at a time at first, my hands extended above my head; and this proved very successful, for eventually I struck a beam.

I jumped again to place its exact position, and then I leaped for it and caught it. Raising myself onto it, I felt my way along to the wall. There I stood erect and reached upward, but I could feel nothing above me.

Then I went to the opposite end of the beam, and still I found nothing to give me any ray of hope.

It would have been suicidal to have investigated farther by leaping up from the beam, and so I dropped to the floor again. Then I leaped for another beam and made a similar investigation, with the same result.

Thus, one beam at a time, I explored the void above them as far as I could reach; but always the result was the same.

My disappointment was intense. In a situation such as mine, one grasps at such tiny straws. He reposes all his hopes, his future, his very life upon them; and when they are inadequate to support the weight of so much responsibility, he is plunged into the uttermost depths of despair.

But I would not admit defeat. The beams were there; they seemed to have been providentially placed for me to use in some way.

I racked my brain, searching for some plan whereby I might escape. I was like a rat in a trap, a cornered rat; and my mind commenced to function with all the cunning of a wild beast seeking to escape a snare.

Presently an idea came to me. It seemed Heaven-sent; but that was probably more because it was the only plan that had presented itself, rather than because it had any intrinsic merit. It was a wild, hare-brained plan that depended upon many things over which I

had no control. Fate must needs be very kind to me if it were to succeed.

I was sitting disconsolately upon the last beam that I had investigated when it came to me. Immediately I dropped to the floor of my cell and went and stood by the door, listening.

How long I remained there, I do not know. When fatigue overcame me, I lay down and slept with my ear against the door. I never left it. I took my exercise jumping about in the same spot there by that fateful door.

At last my ears were rewarded by that for which they had been listening.

Footsteps were approaching. I could hear them shuffling in the distance; I could hear the clank of metal upon metal. The sounds were increasing in volume. A warrior was approaching.

I leaped for the beam directly above the door; and crouching there like a beast of prey, I waited.

The footsteps halted just outside my cell. I heard the bars that secured the door sliding from their keepers, and then the door was pushed open and a light appeared. I saw an arm and hand extend into the room and set down jars of food and water. Then a flaming torch was thrust into the room, followed by a man's head. I saw the fellow looking around the interior of the cell.

"Hey, there!" he cried; "where are you?"

The voice was not that of the man who had brought my food on the previous occasion. I did not reply.

"By the crown of the Jeddak," he muttered, "has the fellow escaped?"

I heard him fussing with the chain that held the door from opening but a few inches, and my heart stood still. Could it be that my wild hope was to be realized? Upon this one hoped-for possibility hinged all the rest of my plans and hopes.

The door swung open, and the man stepped cautiously into the room. He was a sturdy warrior. In his left hand he carried the torch, and in his right he gripped a keen long sword.

He moved cautiously, looking around him at every step.

He was still too close to the door. Very slowly he started across the cell, muttering to himself; and in the darkness above, I followed

along the beam, like a panther stalking its prey. Still mumbling surprised exclamations, he started back. He passed beneath me; and as he did so, I sprang.

Chapter 23

THE SECRET DOOR

Echoing through the chamber and the corridor beyond, the screams of the warrior seemed enough to bring every fighting man in the castle upon me, as I launched myself upon him and brought him to the floor.

As the man went down, the light of the torch was extinguished; we fought in total darkness. My first aim was to quiet his screams, and this I did the instant that my fingers found his throat.

It seemed almost in the nature of a miracle that my dream of escape should be materializing, step by step, almost precisely as I had visualized it; and this thought gave me hope that good fortune might continue to attend me until I was safely out of the clutches of Ul Vas.

The warrior with whom I struggled upon the stone floor of that dark cell beneath the castle of the Tarids was a man of only ordinary physical strength, and I soon subdued him.

Possibly I accomplished this sooner than I might have otherwise; for, after I got my fingers on his throat, I promised I would not kill him if he would cease his struggling and his attempted screaming.

With me, time was an all-important factor; for even if the man's outcry had not been heard by his comrades above stairs, it seemed quite reasonable that if he did not return to his other duties within a reasonable time, a search for him would be instituted. If I were to escape, I must get out at once; and so, after I made my offer to the

man and he ceased his struggling momentarily, I released my grip upon his throat long enough for him to accept or refuse my proposition.

Being a man of intelligence, he accepted.

I immediately bound him with his own harness and, as an added precaution, stuffed a gag in his mouth. Next I relieved him of his dagger, and after groping around on the floor for some time I found the long-sword that had fallen from his hand when I first attacked him.

"And now good-bye, my friend," I said. "You need not feel humiliated at your defeat; far better men than you have gone down before John Carter, Prince of Helium." Then I went out and closed and locked the door of the cell after me.

The corridor was very dark. I had had but one brief glimpse of it, or rather of a portion of it, when my food had been brought to me the previous day.

It had seemed to me then that the corridor led straight away from the entrance to my cell, and now I groped my way through the darkness in that direction.

Probably I should have moved slowly along that unknown passageway; but I did not, for I knew, that if the warrior's cries had been heard in the castle above, there might be an investigation; and I most certainly did not wish to meet a body of armed men in that cul-de-sac.

Keeping one hand against the wall to guide me, I moved rapidly forward; and I had gone perhaps a hundred yards when I discerned a faint suggestion of light ahead of me. It did not seem to be the yellowish light of a torch, but, rather, diffused daylight.

It increased in volume as I approached it, and presently I came to the foot of the stairway down which it was shining.

All this time, I had heard nothing to indicate that anyone was coming to investigate; so it was with a feeling of at least some security that I ascended the stairway.

With the utmost caution, I entered the level above. Here it was much lighter. I was in a short corridor with a doorway on either side; ahead of me the passageway ended in a transverse corridor. I moved quickly forward, for I could now see my way quite clearly,

as the corridor, although extremely gloomy, was much better lighted than that from which I had emerged.

I was congratulating myself upon my good fortune as I was about to turn into the transverse corridor, when I bumped full into a figure at the turn.

It was a woman. She was probably much more surprised than I, and she started to scream.

I knew that, above all things, I must prevent her from giving an alarm; and so I seized her and clapped a hand across her mouth.

I had just turned the corner into the other corridor when I collided with her; its full length was visible to me; and now, as I silenced the woman, I saw two warriors turn into it at the far end. They were coming in my direction.

Evidently I had congratulated myself too soon.

Unencumbered by my captive, I might have found a hiding-place, or, failing that, I could have lain in ambush for them in this darker passageway and killed them both before they could raise an alarm; but here I was with both of my hands occupied, one of them holding the struggling girl and the other effectually silencing her attempt to cry out.

I could not kill her, and if I turned her loose she would have the whole castle on me in a few moments. My case seemed entirely hopeless, but I did not give up hope. I had come this far; I would not, I could not, admit defeat.

Then I recalled the two doors that I had passed in the short corridor. One of them was only a few paces to my rear.

"Keep still, and I will not harm you," I whispered, and then I dragged her along the corridor to the nearest door.

Fortunately, it was unlocked; but what lay beyond it, I did not know. I had to think quickly and decide what I should do if it were occupied. There seemed only one thing to do, push the girl into it and then run back to meet the two warriors that I had seen approaching. In other words, try to fight my way out of the castle of Ul Vas—a mad scheme, with half a thousand warriors to block my way.

But the room was not occupied, as I could see the moment that I entered it; for it was well lighted by several windows.

Closing the door, I stood with my back against it, listening. I had not looked down at the woman in my arms; I was too intent upon listening for the approach of the two warriors I had seen. Would they turn into this corridor? Would they come to this very room?

I must have unconsciously released my pressure upon the girl's lips; for before I could prevent it, she tore my hand away and spoke.

"John Carter!" she exclaimed in a low tone.

I looked down at her in surprise, and then I recognized her. It was Ulah, the slave of Ozara, the Jeddara of the Tarids.

"Ulah," I said, earnestly, "please do not make me harm you. I do not wish to harm anyone in the castle; I only wish to escape. More than my life depends upon that, so very much more that I would break the unwritten law of my caste even to killing a woman, were it necessary to do so to accomplish my purpose."

"You need not fear me," she said, "I will not betray you."

"You are a wise girl," I said; "you have bought your life very cheaply."

"It was not to save my life that I promised," she said. "I would not have betrayed you in any event."

"And why?" I asked. "You owe me nothing."

"I love my mistress, Ozara," she said simply.

"And what has that to do with it?" I asked.

"I would not harm one whom my mistress loves."

Of course, I knew that Ulah was romancing—letting her imagination work overtime; and as it was immaterial what she believed so long as she helped me, I did not contradict her.

"Where is your mistress now?" I asked.

"She is in this very tower," she replied. "She is locked in a room directly above this one, on the next level. Ul Vas is keeping her there until he is ready to destroy her. Oh, save her, John Carter, save her!"

"How did you learn my name, Ulah?" I asked.

"The Jeddara told me," she replied; "she talked about you constantly."

"You are better acquainted with the castle than I am, Ulah," I said; "is there any way in which I can reach the Jeddara? "Can you

get a message to her? Could we get her out of that room?"

"No," she replied; "the door is locked, and two warriors stand guard outside it day and night."

I walked to the window and looked out. There seemed to be no one in sight. Then I leaned out as far as I could and looked up. Perhaps fifteen feet above me was another window. I turned back into the room.

"You are sure that the Jeddara is in the room directly above this?" I asked.

"I know it," she replied.

"And you want to help her to escape?"

"Yes; there is nothing that I would not do to serve her."

"What is this room used for?" I asked.

"Nothing, now," she replied; "you see everything is covered with dust. It has not been used for a long time."

"You think it is not likely that anyone will come here?" I asked. "You think I might hide here safely until tonight?"

"I am sure that you are perfectly safe," she replied; "I do not know why anyone should come here."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Do you really want to help your mistress to escape?"

"With all my heart," she replied. "I could not bear to see her die."

"You can help her, then," I said.

"How?"

"Bring me a rope and a strong hook. Do you think you can do it?"

"How long a rope?"

"About twenty feet."

"When do you want them?"

"Whenever you can bring them without danger of detection, but certainly before midnight tonight."

"I can get them," she said. "I will go at once."

I had to trust her; there was no other way, and so I let her depart.

After she had gone and I had closed the door behind her, I found a heavy bar on the inside. I dropped this into its keeper so that no

one could enter the room unexpectedly and take me by surprise. Then I sat down to wait.

Those were long hours that dragged themselves slowly by. I could not but constantly question my wisdom in trusting the slave girl, Ulah. What did I know about her? By what loyalty was she bound to me, except by the thin bond engendered by her foolish imagination? Perhaps, already, she had arranged for my capture. It would not be at all surprising that she had a lover among the warriors, as she was quite beautiful. What better turn could she serve him than by divulging the place of my concealment and permitting him to be the means of my capture and perhaps thereby winning promotion?

Toward the end of the afternoon, when I heard footsteps coming along the corridor toward my hiding place—the first sounds that I had heard since Ulah left me—I was certain that warriors were coming to seize me. I determined that I would give a good account of myself; and so I stood by the door, my long sword ready in my hand; but the footsteps passed by me. They were moving in the direction of the stairway up which I had come from the black corridor leading to my cell.

Not long after, I heard them returning. There were a number of men talking excitedly, but through the heavy door I could not quite catch their words. When they had passed out of hearing, I breathed a sigh of relief; and my confidence in Ulah commenced to take new heart.

Night fell. Light began to shine beyond many of the windows in the castle visible from the room in which I hid.

Why did not Ulah return? Had she been unable to find a rope and a hook? Was something or someone detaining her? What futile questions one propounds in the extremity of despair.

Presently I heard a sound outside the door of the room. I had heard no one approaching; but now I knew that someone was pushing on the door, attempting to enter. I went close to it and put my ear against the panels. Then I heard a voice. "Open, it is Ulah."

Great was my relief as I drew the bar and admitted the slave girl. It was quite dark in the room; we could not see one another.

"Did you think I was never going to return, John Carter?" she asked.

"I was commencing to have my doubts," I replied. "Were you able to get the things I asked for?"

"Yes, here they are," she said, and I felt a rope and a hook pressed into my hand.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Have you learned anything while you were away that might help me or the Jeddara?"

"No," she said, "nothing that will help you but something that may make it more difficult for you to leave the castle, if that were possible at all, which I doubt."

"What is that?" I demanded.

"They have learned of your escape from the cell," she replied. "The warrior who was sent there with your food did not return; and when other warriors went to investigate, they found him bound and gagged in the cell where you should have been."

"It must have been they I heard passing the door late in the afternoon," I said.

"It is strange they have not searched this room."

"They think you went in another direction," she explained. "They are searching another part of the castle."

"But eventually they will come here?" I asked.

"Yes," she said; "eventually they will search every room in the castle, but that will take a long time."

"You have done well, Ulah," I said. "I am sorry that I can offer you nothing more in return than my thanks."

"I shall be glad to do even more," she said; "there is nothing that I would not do to help you and the jeddara."

"There is nothing more that you can do," I told her; "and now you had better go, before they find you here with me."

"You are sure that there is nothing more I can do?" she asked.

"No, nothing, Ulah," and I opened the door, and she went out.

"Good-bye, and good luck, John Carter," she whispered, as I closed the door behind her.

I went at once to the window, after rebolting the door. It was very dark outside. I had wanted to wait until after midnight and until the castle was asleep before I attempted to put into practice the plan I contemplated for the rescue of Ozara, but the knowledge

that they were searching the castle for me forced me to put aside every consideration except haste.

I fastened one end of the rope securely to the hook that Ulah had brought me.

Then I sat on the window sill and leaned far out.

I took one end of the rope in my left hand where I grasped the frame of the window, and held the hook in my right hand, permitting the slack of the rope to fall free beneath me against the side of the tower outside the window.

I gauged the distance upward to the sill of the window above. It seemed too far for me to hope to make a successful cast from the position in which I was sitting, and so I arose and stood on the sill of the window. This brought me a few feet nearer my goal and also gave me a little more freedom of action.

I was very anxious to be successful at the first cast; for I feared that if I missed, the rattling of the metal hook against the side of the tower might attract attention.

I stood there several minutes gauging the distance and going through all the motions of throwing the hook except actually releasing it.

When I felt that I had the timing and the distance as accurately gauged as it was possible to do in this manner, I swung the hook upward and released it.

I could see the sill above me, because a faint light was coming from the room beyond it. I saw the hook swing into this light; I heard it strike the sill with a metallic ring; then I pulled down upon the rope.

The hook had caught! I put considerable weight upon the rope, and still the hook held. I waited a moment to see if I had attracted the attention of Ozara or anyone else who might be in the room with her.

No sign came out of the silence above, and I let my body swing out upon the rope.

I had to ascend very carefully, for I did not know how secure a hold the hook had upon the sill above.

I had not a great distance to climb, yet it seemed an eternity before my hand touched the sill.

First the fingers of one hand closed over it; then I drew myself up until I could grasp it with my other hand. Slowly, by main strength, I raised myself until my eyes were above the level of the sill. Before me was a dimly lighted room, apparently vacant.

I drew myself up farther until I could get one knee upon the sill, and always I was very careful not to dislodge the hook.

When, at last, my position was secure, I entered the room, taking the hook in with me lest it slip and fall to the bottom of the tower on the outside.

Now I saw that the room was occupied. A woman rose from her bed upon the opposite side. She was looking at me with wide, horror-struck eyes. It was Ozara. I thought she was going to scream.

Raising a warning finger to my lips, I approached her. "Make no sound, Ozara," I whispered; "I have come to save you."

"John Carter!" She breathed the name in tones so low that they could not have been heard beyond the door. As she spoke, she came close and threw her arms about my neck.

"Come," I said, "we must get out of here at once. Do not talk; we may be overheard."

Taking her to the window, I drew in the rope and fastened the lower end of it around her waist.

"I am going to lower you to the window of the room just below," I whispered. "As soon as you are safely inside, untie the rope and let it swing out for me."

She nodded, and I lowered her away. Presently the rope went slack, and I knew that she had reached the sill of the room below. I waited for her to unfasten it from her body; then I engaged the hook over the sill upon which I sat, and quickly descended to the room below.

I did not wish to leave the hook and the rope as they were, because, in the event that anyone should enter Ozara's cell above, this evidence would point immediately to the room below; and I did not know how long we might have to wait here.

As gently as possible, I shook the hook loose and was fortunate in catching it as it dropped and before it could scrape against the side of the tower.

As I entered the room, Ozara came close to me and placed her

hands upon my breast. She was trembling, and her voice was trembling as she spoke.

"I was so surprised to see you, John Carter," she said. "I thought that you were dead. I saw them strike you down, and Ul Vas told me that they had killed you.

"What a terrible wound; I do not see how you recovered. When you faced me in the, room above and I saw the blood dried upon your skin and in your hair, it was as though a dead man had come back to life."

"I had forgotten what a spectacle I must present," I said. "I have had no opportunity to wash the blood from me since I was wounded. What little water they brought me barely sufficed for drinking purposes; but as far as the wound is concerned, it does not bother me. I am quite recovered; it was only a flesh wound."

"I was so frightened for you," she said; "and to think that you took that risk for me, when you might have escaped with your friends."

"You think they got away all right?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, "and Ul Vas is very furious about it .He will make you and me pay, if we do not escape."

"Do you know of any way by which we can escape from this castle?" I asked her.

"There is a secret doorway, known only to Ul Vas and two of his most faithful slaves," she replied. "At least, Ul Vas thinks that only those three know of it; but I know. It leads out to the edge of the river where the waters lap the walls of the castle.

"Ul Vas is not well-liked by his people. There are plots and intrigues in the castle. There are factions that would like to overthrow Ul Vas and set up a new jeddak. Some of these enemies are so powerful that Ul Vas does not dare destroy them openly. These, he murders secretly; and he has his two faithful slaves carry the bodies to this secret doorway and cast them into the river.

"Once, suspecting something of the kind, I followed him, thinking that I might discover a way to escape and return to my own people in Domnia; but when I saw where the passage led, I was afraid. I would not dare to jump into the river; and even if I did, beyond the river there is a terrible forest. I do not know, John Carter, that we would be much better off either in the river or the forest than we

are here."

"If we remain here, Ozara, we know that we shall meet death and that there will be no escape. In the river or the forest beyond, there will be at least a chance; for often wild beasts are less cruel than men."

"I know that all too well," she replied; "but even in the forest there are men, terrible men."

"Nevertheless, I must take the chance, Ozara," I told her. "Will you come with me?"

"Wherever you take me, John Carter, whatever fate befalls us, I shall be happy as long as I am with you. I was very angry when I learned that you loved that woman from Barsoom," she said; "but now she is gone, and I shall have you all to myself."

"She is my mate, Ozara."

"You love her?" she demanded.

"Of course," I replied.

"That is all right," she said, "but she is gone, and you are mine now."

I had no time to waste on such matters then. It was apparent that the girl was self-willed; that she had always had her own way, had everything that she wished, and could not brook being crossed, no matter how foolish her whim might be. At another time, if we lived, I might bring her to her senses; but now I must bend every effort to escape.

"How can we reach this secret doorway?" I asked. "Do you know the way from here?"

"Yes," she replied; "come with me."

We crossed the room and entered the corridor. It was very dark, but we groped our way to the stairs that I had ascended from the pit earlier in the day. When she started down these, I questioned her.

"Are you sure this is the right way?" I asked. "This leads to the cell in which I was imprisoned."

"Perhaps it does," she said; "but it also leads to a distant part of the castle, close to the river, where we shall find the doorway we are seeking."

I hoped that she knew what she was talking about as I followed her down the stairway and through the Stygian darkness of the corridor below.

When I had come through it before, I had guided myself by pressing my right hand against the wall at my side. Now Ozara followed the opposite wall; and when we had gone a short distance, turned into a corridor at our right that I had passed without knowing of its existence, because I had been following the opposite wall; and of course in the absolute darkness of the corridor, I had not been able to see anything.

We followed this new corridor for a long distance, but finally ascended a circular stairway to the next level above.

Here we came into a lighted corridor.

"If we can reach the other end of this without being discovered," whispered Ozara, "we shall be safe. At the far end is a false door that leads into the secret passageway ending at the door above the river."

We both listened intently. "I hear no one," she said.

"Nor I."

As we started down the long corridor, I saw that there were rooms opening from it on either side; but as we approached each door I was relieved to find that it was closed.

We had covered perhaps half the length of the corridor when a slight noise behind us attracted my attention; and, turning, I saw two men step from one of the rooms we had recently passed. They were turning away from us, toward the opposite end of the corridor; and I was breathing a sigh of relief, when a third man followed them from the room. This one, through some perversity of fate, glanced in our direction; and immediately he voiced an exclamation of surprise and warning.

"The Jeddara!" he cried, "and the black-haired one!"

Instantly the three turned and ran toward us. We were about halfway between them and the door leading to the secret passage that was our goal.

Flight, in the face of an enemy, is something that does not set well upon my stomach; but now there was no alternative, since to stand and fight would have been but to insure disaster; and so

Ozara and I fled.

The three men pursuing us were shouting at the tops of their voices for the evident purpose of attracting others to their assistance.

Something prompted me to draw my long-sword as I ran; and it is fortunate that I did so; for just as we were approaching a doorway on our left, a warrior, attracted by the noise in the corridor, stepped out. Ozara dodged past him just as he drew his sword. I did not even slacken my speed but took him in my stride, cleaving his skull as I raced past him.

Now we were at the door, and Ozara was searching for the secret mechanism that would open it to us. The three men were approaching rapidly.

"Take your time, Ozara," I cautioned her, for I knew that in the haste of nervousness her fingers might bungle the job and delay us.

"I am trembling so," she said; "they will reach us before I can open it."

"Don't worry about them," I told her. "I can hold them off until you open it."

Then the three were upon me. I recognized them as officers of the Jeddak's guard, because their trappings were the same as those worn by Zamak; and I surmised, and rightly, that they were good swordsmen.

The one in the lead was too impetuous. He rushed upon me as though he thought he could cut me down with his first stroke, which was not the part of wisdom. I ran him through the heart.

As he fell, the others were upon me but they fought more cautiously; yet, though there were two of them, and their blades were constantly thrusting and cutting in an endeavor to reach me, my own sword, moving with the speed of thought, wove a steel net of defense about me.

But defense alone would not answer my purpose; for if they could keep me on the defensive, they could hold me here until reinforcements came; and then, by force of numbers, I must be overcome.

In the instant, following a parry, my point reached out and pricked one of my adversaries sharply above the heart.

involuntarily, he shrank back; and as he did so I turned upon his companion and opened his chest wide.

Neither wound was mortal, but they slowed my adversaries down. Ozara was still fumbling with the door. Our situation promised to be most unpleasant if she were unable to open it, for now at the far end of the corridor I saw a detachment of warriors racing toward us; but I did not warn her to hurry, fearing that then, in her excitement, she would never be able to open it.

The two wounded men were now pressing me hard again. They were brave warriors and worthy foemen. It is a pleasure to be pitted against such, although there are always regrets when one must kill them. However, I had no choice, for then I heard a sudden cry of relief from Ozara.

"It is open, John Carter," she cried. "Come! Hurry!"

But now the two warriors were engaging me so fiercely that I could not break away from them.

But just for an instant was I held. With a burst of speed and a ferocity such as I imagine they had never beheld before, I took the battle to them. A vicious cut brought down one; and as he fell, I ran the other through the chest.

The reinforcements running toward us had covered half the length of the corridor as I hurried through the doorway after Ozara and closed the door behind me.

Now again we were in complete darkness. "Hurry!" cried Ozara. "The passageway is straight and level all the way to the door."

Through the darkness, we ran. I heard the men behind me open the door, and knew that they were in the passageway at our rear; fully twenty of them there must have been.

Suddenly I ran full upon Ozara. We had come to the end of the passage, and she was standing at the door. This door she opened more quickly; and as it swung in, I saw the dark river flowing beneath us. Upon the opposite shore was the gloomy outline of the forest.

How cold and mysterious this strange river looked. What mysteries, what dangers, what terrors, lay in the sinister wood beyond?

But I was only vaguely conscious of such thoughts. The warriors

who would seize us and carry us back to death were almost upon us as I took Ozara in my arms and jumped.

Chapter 24

BACK TO BARSOOM

Dark, forbidding waters closed over our heads and swirled about us as we rose to the surface; and, equally dark and forbidding, the forest frowned upon us. Even the moaning of the wind in the trees seemed an eerie warning, forbidding, threatening. Behind us, the warriors in the doorway shouted curses upon us.

I struck out for the opposite shore, holding Ozara in one arm and keeping her mouth and nose above water. She lay so limp that I thought she had fainted, nor would I have been surprised, for even a woman of the strongest fibre might weaken after having undergone what she had had to during the last two days.

But when we reached the opposite shore, she clambered out on the bank in full possession of all her faculties.

"I thought that you had swooned," I said; "you lay so very still."

"I do not swim," she replied; "and I knew that if I struggled, it would hamper you." There was even more to the erstwhile Jeddara of the Tarids than I had imagined.

"What are we going to do now, John Carter?" she asked. Her teeth were chattering from cold, or terror; and she seemed very miserable.

"You are cold," I said; "if I can find anything dry enough to burn, we shall have a fire."

The girl came close to me. I could feel her body trembling against mine.

"I am a little cold," she said, "but that is nothing; I am terribly afraid."

"But why are you afraid now, Ozara? Do you think that Ul Vas will send men after us?"

"No, it is not that," she replied. "He couldn't make men come into this wood at night, and even by daylight they would hesitate to venture into it on this side of the river. Tomorrow he will know that it will be useless to send after us, for tomorrow we shall be dead."

"What makes you say that?" I demanded.

"The beasts," she said, "the beasts that hunt through the forest by night; we cannot escape them."

"Yet you came here willingly."

"Ul Vas would have tortured us," she replied; "the beasts will be more merciful. Listen! You can hear them now."

In the distance, I heard strange grunts and then a fearsome roar.

"They are not near us," I said.

"They will come," she replied.

"Then I had better get a fire started; that will keep them away."

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"I hope so."

I knew that in any forest there must be deadwood; and so, although it was pitch dark, I commenced to search for fallen branches; and soon I had collected a little pile of these and some dry leaves.

The Tarids had not taken away my pocket pouch, and in it I still had the common Martian appliance for making fire.

"You said that the Tarids would hesitate to enter the forest on this side of the river even by day," I remarked, as I sought to ignite the dry leaves with which I hoped to start my fire. "Why is that?"

"The Masenas," she replied. "They often come up the river in great numbers, hunting the Tarids; and unfortunate is he whom they find outside the castle walls. It is seldom, however, that they cross to the other side of the river."

"Why do they hunt the Tarids?" I asked. "What do they want of them?"

"Food," she replied.

"You don't mean to say that the Masenas eat human flesh?" I demanded.

She nodded. "Yes, they are very fond of it."

I had succeeded in igniting the leaves, and now I busied myself placing small twigs upon my newborn fire and building it up into the semblance of something worth while.

"But I was imprisoned for a long time with one of the Masenas," I reminded her.

"He seemed very friendly."

"Under those circumstances, of course," she said, "he might not try to eat you. He might even become very friendly; but if you should meet him here in the forest with his own people, you would find him very different. They are hunting beasts, like all of the other creatures, that inhabit the forest."

My fire grew to quite a respectable size. It illuminated the forest and the surface of the river and the castle beyond.

When it blazed up and revealed us, the Tarids, called across to us, prophesying our early death.

The warmth of the fire was pleasant after our emersion from the cold water and our exposure to the chill of the forest night. Ozara came close to it, stretching her lithe, young body before it. The yellow flames illuminated her fair skin, imparted a greenish tinge to her blue hair, awakened slumberous fires in her languorous eyes.

Suddenly she tensed, her eyes widened in fright. "Look!" she whispered, and pointed.

I turned in the direction that she indicated. From the dense shadows just beyond the firelight, two blazing eyes were flaming.

"They have come for us," said Ozara.

I picked a blazing brand from the fire and hurled it at the intruder. There was a hideous, bloodcurdling scream as the eyes disappeared.

The girl was trembling again. She cast affrighted glances in all directions.

"There is another," she exclaimed presently, "and there, and there, and there."

I caught a glimpse of a great body slinking in the shadows; and all about us, as I turned, I saw blazing eyes. I threw a few more brands, but the eyes disappeared for only a moment to return again almost immediately, and each time they seemed to come closer; and now, since I had cast the first brand, the beasts were roaring and growling and screaming continuously—a veritable diapason of horror.

I realized that my fire would not last long if I kept throwing it at the beasts, as I had not sufficient wood to keep it replenished.

Something must be done. I cast about me rather hopelessly in search of some avenue of escape and discovered a nearby tree that looked as though it might be easily scaled. Only such a tree would be of any advantage to us, as I had no doubt that the creatures would charge the moment that we started to climb.

I took two brands from the fire and handed them to Ozara, and then selected two for myself.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"We are going to try to climb that tree," I replied. "Perhaps some of these brutes can climb, too, but we shall have to take a chance. Those I have seen look too large and heavy for climbing.

"We will walk slowly to the foot of the tree. When we are there, throw your brands at the nearest beasts; and then start to climb. When you are safely out of their reach, I will follow."

Slowly we crossed from the fire to the tree, waving the blazing brands about us.

Here, Ozara did as I had bid her; and when she was safely out of the way, I grasped one of my brands in my teeth, hurled the other, and started to climb.

The beasts charged almost instantly, but I reached a point of safety before they could drag me down, though what with the smoke of the brand in my eyes and the sparks being scraped off against my naked hide, I was lucky to have made it at all; but I felt that we must have the light of the brand, as I did not know what arboreal enemies might be lurking in the branches above.

I immediately examined the tree, climbing to the highest branches that would support my weight. With the aid of my light, I discovered that no creature was in it, other than Ozara and myself;

and high among the branches I made a happy find—an enormous nest, carefully woven and lined with soft grasses.

I was about to call down to Ozara to come up, when I saw her already ascending just below me.

When she saw the nest, she told me that it was probably one of those built by the Masenas for temporary use during a raid or expedition into this part of the forest. It was certainly a most providential find, as it afforded us a comfortable place in which to spend the remainder of the night.

It was some time before we could accustom ourselves to the noises of the beasts howling beneath us, but at last we fell asleep; and when we awoke in the morning, they had departed; and the forest was quiet.

Ozara had told me that her country, Domnia, lay across the mountains that rose beyond the forest and that it might be reached by following the river down for a considerable distance to the end of the range, where we could follow another river up to Domnia upon the opposite side.

The most remarkable feature of the following two days was the fact that we survived them. We found food in plenty; and as we were always near the river, we never suffered for lack of water; but by day and by night we were constantly in danger of attack by the roving flesh-eaters.

We always sought to save ourselves by climbing into trees, but upon three occasions we were taken by surprise; and I was forced to fall back upon my sword, which had seemed to me a most inadequate weapon of defense against some of the ferocious beasts that assailed us.

However, in these three instances, I managed to kill our attackers, although, I must confess, that it seemed to me then, and still does, wholly a matter of luck that I succeeded.

By now, Ozara was in a more sanguine frame of mind.

Having survived this long, she felt that it was entirely possible that we might live to reach Domnia, although originally she had been confident that we could not come through the first night alive.

She was often quite gay now, and she was really very good company. Especially was this true on the morning of the third day

as we were making good progress toward our distant goal.

The forest seemed to be unusually quiet; and we had seen no dangerous beasts all that day, when suddenly a chorus of hideous roars arose all about us; and simultaneously a score or more of creatures dropped from the concealing foliage of the trees about us.

Ozara's happy chatter died on her lips. "The Masenas!" she cried.

As they surrounded us and started to close in on us, their roaring ceased and they commenced to meow and purr. This, to me, seemed far more horrifying. As they came closer, I decided to make our capture cost them dearly, though I knew that eventually they would take us. I had seen Umka fight, and I knew what to expect.

Although they closed about me, they did not seem anxious to engage me. By pushing close to me on one side and then on the other, by giving away here and then there, I was forced to move about considerably; but I did not realize until it was too late that I was moving in the direction that they wished me to move and in accordance with their designs.

Presently they got me where they wanted me, beneath the branches of a great tree; and immediately a Masena dropped upon my shoulders and bore me to earth.

Simultaneously, most of the others swarmed on top of me, while a few seized Ozara; and thus they disarmed me before I could strike a blow.

There was a great amount of purring after that, and they seemed to be having some sort of a discussion; but as it was in their own language, I did not understand it. Presently, however, they started down river, dragging us along with them.

After perhaps an hour, we came to a section of the forest from which all the brushwood had been cleared. The ground beneath the trees was almost like a lawn.

The branches of the trees were trimmed to a considerable distance about the ground.

As we reached the edge of this park-like space, our captors set up a loud roaring which was presently answered from the trees we were approaching.

We were dragged to the foot of a great tree, up which several of our captors swarmed like cats.

Then came the problem of getting us up. I could see that it puzzled the Masenas, as well it might have. The hole of the tree was so large in diameter that no ordinary man could scale it, and all the branches had been cut off much higher than a man could jump. I could easily have entered it, but I did not tell them so. Ozara, however, could never have succeeded alone.

Presently, after considerable meowing and purring and not a little growling, some of those in the tree above lowered a pliant liana. One of the Masenas on the ground seized Ozara around the waist with one arm and the liana with his free hand and both his feet. Then those above hoisted this human elevator until it could find secure footing for itself and its passenger among the branches above.

In like manner, I was hoisted into the tree, where, thereafter, the climbing was easy.

We ascended only a few feet, however, before we came to a rude platform upon which was built one of the strange, arboreal houses of the Masenas.

Now, in all directions, I could see similar houses as far as my eyes could penetrate through the foliage. I could see that in some places branches had been cut and laid from tree to tree to form walk-ways between the houses. In other places there were only lianas where the Masenas must have crossed hand over hand from one tree to its neighbor.

The house into which we were now conducted was quite large and easily accommodated not only the twenty-odd men that had captured us but fully fifty more that soon congregated.

The Masenas squatted upon their haunches facing the far end of the room where sat, alone, a single male that I took to be their king.

There was a great deal of meowing and purring as they discussed us in their language, and finally I became impatient, Recalling that Umka had spoken the language of the Tarids, I thought it not at all unlikely that some of these others might; and so I addressed them in that tongue.

"Why have you captured us?" I demanded. "We are not your enemies. We were escaping from the Tarids, who are. They had us imprisoned and were about to kill us. Do any of you understand what I am saying?"

"I understand you," replied the creature whom I took to be king. "I understand your words, but your argument is meaningless. When we leave our houses and go down into the forest we may mean harm to no creature, yet that does not protect us from the beasts of prey that feed upon the flesh of their kill. There are few arguments that would satisfactorily overcome the cravings of the belly."

"You mean that you are going to eat us?" I demanded.

"Certainly," he replied.

Ozara shrank closer to me. "So this is the end," she said, "and what a horrible end! It did us no good to escape from Ul Vas."

"We have at least had three days of freedom that we would not otherwise have had," I reminded her; "and, anyway, we must die some time."

The Masena king spoke to his people in their own tongue, and immediately they set up a great meowing and purring, as, with savage growls, a number of them seized Ozara and me and started to drag us toward the entrance.

They had almost reached the doorway with us when a lone Masena entered and paused before us.

"Umka!" I cried.

"John Carter!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here, and the Jeddara of the Tarids?"

"We escaped from Ul Vas, and now we are about to be eaten by your people," I told him.

Umka spoke to the men who were dragging us from the room; they hesitated a moment; and then they led us back before the Masena king, whom Umka addressed for several minutes.

After he had ceased, the king and others in the room carried on what appeared to be a heated discussion. When they had finished, Umka turned toward me.

"You are to be set free," he said, "in return for what you did for me; but you must leave our country at once."

"Nothing would suit us better," I replied.

"Some of us are going with you to see that none of our people attack you while you are still in the land of the Masenas."

After we had set out with our strange escort, I asked Umka to tell

me what he knew of my friends.

"After we left the castle of the Tarids," he explained, "we drifted around idly in the air for a long time. They wanted to follow the man who had taken the woman away in the other ship, but they did not know where to search. Today I looked down and saw that we were over Masena, and I asked them to put me on the ground. This they did, and they are still there for all I know, as they were taking fresh water aboard and were going to gather fruits and hunt for meat."

It developed that the landing had been made at no great distance from where we then were, and at my request he led us to the spot.

As we approached it, the hearts of two of that party almost stopped beating, so great was the suspense. It quite easily might mean the difference between life and death for Ozara and me.

And then we saw it, the strange craft, lying in a little clearing among the trees.

Umka thought it best that he and his fellows should not approach the craft, as he might not be able to restrain them in the presence of these others whom they had not promised to protect; so we thanked him and bade him good-bye, and he and his weird companions melted into the forest.

None of the three on the ship had noticed our approach, and we were quite close to her before they discovered us. They greeted us enthusiastically as two returned from the dead. Even Ur Jan was genuinely pleased to see me.

The assassin of Zodanga was furious with Gar Nal because he had broken his oath; and now, to my astonishment, the fellow threw his sword at my feet and swore eternal fealty to me.

"Never in my life," he said, "have I fought shoulder to shoulder with such a swordsman, and never shall it be said that I have drawn sword against him."

I accepted his service, and then I asked them how they had been able to maneuver the ship to this point.

"Zanda was the only one who knew anything about the mechanism or its control," explained Jat Or; "and after a little experimenting, she found that she could operate it." He looked proudly at her, and I read much in the smile that passed between

them.

"You seem none the worse off for your experiences, Zanda," I said; "in fact, you appear very happy."

"I am very happy, Vandor," she replied, "happier than I ever expected to be in my life."

She emphasized the word Vandor, and I thought that I detected a smile lurking deep in her eyes.

"Is your happiness so great," I asked, "that it has caused you to forget your vow to kill John Carter?"

She returned my bantering smile as she replied. "I do not know anyone by the name of John Carter."

Jat Or and Ur Jan were laughing but I could see that Ozara did not know what it was all about.

"I hope for his sake that you never meet him, Zanda," I said, "for I am rather fond of him, and I should hate to see him killed."

"Yes," she said, "I should hate to kill him, for I know now that he is the bravest man and the truest friend in the world—with possibly one exception," she added, with a sly glance at Jat Or.

We discussed our situation at length, and tried to make plans for the future, and at last we decided to act upon Ozara's suggestion that we go to Domnia and enlist the aid of her father. From there, she thought, we might more easily conduct the search for Gar Nal and Dejah Thoris.

I shall not take up your time with an account of our journey to Ozara's country or of the welcome that we received at the hands of her father and the strange sights that we saw in this Thurian city.

Ozara's father is the jeddak of Domnia. He is a powerful man, with political affiliations in other cities of the nearer moon. His agents are everywhere among the peoples with whom his country has relations, either amicable or otherwise; and it was not long before word reached him that a strange object that floated in the air had become disabled and had been captured in the country of Ombra. In it were a man and a woman.

The Domnians gave us explicit directions for reaching Ombra; and, exacting a promise from us that we would return and visit them after the conclusion of our adventure, they bid us good-bye.

My parting with Ozara was rather painful. She told me quite

frankly that she loved me, but that she was resigned to the fact that my heart belonged to another. She exhibited splendid strength of character then that I had not believed she possessed, and when she bid me farewell it was with the wish that I find my princess and enjoy the happiness that I deserved.

As our ship rose above Domnia, my heart was full with a sense of elation, so great was my assurance that I should soon be united with the incomparable Dejah Thoris. I was thus certain of success because of what Ozara's father had told me of the character of the Jeddak of Ombra. He was an arrant coward, and almost any sort of a demonstration would bring him to his knees suing for peace.

Now we were in a position to make a demonstration such as the Ombrans had never witnessed; for, in common with the other inhabitants of Thuria that we had seen thus far, they were entirely ignorant of firearms.

It was my intention to fly low and make my demands for the return of Dejah Thoris and Gar Nal to me, without putting myself in the power of the Ombrans.

If they refused, which I was quite certain that they would, I intended giving them a demonstration of the effectiveness of the firearms of Barsoom through the medium of the ship's guns that I have already described. That, I was confident, would bring the Jeddak to terms; and I hoped to accomplish it without unnecessary loss of life.

We were all quite gay as we sailed off toward Ombra. Jat Or and Zanda were planning upon the home they expected to establish in Helium, and Ur Jan was anticipating a position among the fighting men of my retinue and a life of honor and respectability.

Presently, Zanda called my attention to the fact that we were gaining considerable altitude, and complained of dizziness. Almost at the same time I felt a weakness stealing over me, and simultaneously Ur Jan collapsed.

Followed by Jat Or, I staggered to the control room, where a glance at the altimeter showed me that we had risen to dangerous heights. Instantly I directed the brain to regulate the oxygen supply in the interior of the ship, and then I directed it to drop nearer to the surface of the satellite.

It obeyed my directions insofar as the oxygen supply was

concerned, but it continued to rise past the point where the altimeter could register our height.

As Thuria faded in the distance astern, I realized that we were flying at tremendous speed, a speed far in excess of that which I had directed.

It was evident that the brain was entirely out of control. There was nothing more that I could do; so I returned to the cabin. Here I found that both Zanda and Ur Jan had recovered, now that the oxygen supply had been replenished.

I told them that the ship was running wild in space and that our eventual fate could be nothing more than a matter of idle speculation— they knew as much about it as I.

My hopes, that had been so high, were now completely dashed; and the farther that we sped from Thuria, the greater became my anguish, though I hid my personal feelings from my companions.

It was not until it became apparent that we were headed for Barsoom that even hope of life was renewed in the breasts of any of us.

As we drew near the surface of the planet, it became evident to me that the ship was fully under control; and I wondered whether or not the brain itself had discovered the power of original thought, for I knew that I was not controlling it nor were any of my companions.

It was night, a very dark night. The ship was approaching a large city. I could see the lights ahead, and as we drew closer I recognized that the city was Zodanga.

As though guided by a human hand and brain, the ship slid silently across the eastern wall of the great city, dropped into the shadows of a dark avenue, and moved steadily toward its unknown destination.

But not for long was the destination to be unknown. Presently the neighborhood became familiar. We were moving very slowly. Zanda was with me in the control room, gazing through one of the forward ports.

"The house of Fal Sivas!" she exclaimed.

I recognized it, too, and then just in front of us I saw the open doors of the great hangar from which I had stolen the ship.

With the utmost precision, the ship turned slowly about until its tail pointed toward the hangar doorway. Then it backed in and settled down upon its scaffolding.

At my direction, the doors opened and the ladder dropped out to the floor; and a moment later I was searching for Fal Sivas, to demand an explanation. Ur Jan and Jat Or accompanied me with drawn swords, and Zanda followed close behind.

I went at once to Fal Sivas's sleeping quarters. They were deserted; but as I was leaving them, I saw a note fastened beside the door. It was addressed to me.

I opened it and read the following:

From Fal Sivas

Of Zodanga

To John Carter

Of Helium

Let this be known:

You betrayed me. You stole my ship. You thought that your puny mind could best that of the great Fal Sivas.

Very well, John Carter, it shall be a duel of minds—my mind against yours.

Let us see who will win.

I am recalling the ship.

I am directing it to return from wherever it may be and at full speed. It is to allow no other brain to change its course. I am commanding it to return to its hangar and remain there forever unless it receives contrary directions from my brain.

Know you then, John Carter, when you read this note, that I, Fal Sivas, have won; and that as long as I live, no other brain than mine can ever cause my ship to move.

I might have dashed the ship to pieces against the ground and thus destroyed you; but then I could not have gloated over you, as I

now shall.

Do not search for me. I am hidden where you can never find me.

I have written. That is all.

There was a grim finality about that note and a certain authority that seemed to preclude even faint hope. I was crushed.

In silence, I handed it to Jat Or and asked him to read it aloud to the others.

When he had finished it, Ur Jan drew his short sword and offered it to me hilt first.

"It is I who am the cause of your sorrow," he said. "My life belongs to you. I offer it to you now in atonement."

I shook my head and pushed his hand away. "You did not know what you were doing, Ur Jan," I said.

"Perhaps it is not the end," said Zanda. "Where can Fal Sivas hide that determined men may not find him?"

"Let us dedicate our lives to that purpose," said Jat Or; and there, in the quarters of Fal Sivas, we four swore to hunt him down.

As we stepped out into the corridor, I saw a man approaching. He was tiptoeing stealthily in our direction. He did not see me instantly because he was casting an apprehensive glance back across his shoulder, as though fearful of discovery from that direction.

When he faced me, we were both surprised—it was Rapas the Ulsio.

At sight of Ur Jan and me standing side by side, The Rat went ashen grey. He started to turn, as though to run; but evidently he thought better of it, for he immediately faced us again, and stood staring at us as though fascinated.

As we approached him, he affected a silly grin. "Well, Vandor," he said, "this is a surprise. I am glad to see you."

"Yes, you must be," I replied. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Fal Sivas."

"Did you expect to find him here?" demanded Ur Jan.

"Yes," replied Rapas.

"Then why were you sneaking in on your tiptoes?" inquired the assassin. "You are lying, Rapas. You knew that Fal Sivas was not

here. If you had thought that he was here, you would not have had the nerve to come, for you knew that he knew that you were in my employ."

Ur Jan stepped forward quickly and grasped Rapas by the throat. "Listen, you rat," he growled; "you know where Fal Sivas is. Tell me, or I'll wring your neck."

The fellow commenced to grovel and whine, "Don't, don't; you are hurting me," he cried. "You will kill me."

"At least you have told the truth for once," growled the assassin. "Quick now; out with it. Where is Fal Sivas?"

"If I tell you, will you promise not to kill me?" asked The Rat.

"We will promise you that and more," I said; "Tel us where Fal Sivas is, and I'll give you your weight in treasure."

"Speak up," said Ur Jan, giving the fellow a shake.

"Fal Sivas is in the house of Gar Nal," whispered Rapas, "but don't tell him that I told you; don't tell him that I told you or he will kill me horribly."

I did not dare turn Rapas loose for fear he would betray us, and furthermore he promised to gain entrance to Gar Nal's for us and lead us to the room where we would find Fal Sivas.

I could not imagine what Fal Sivas was doing in the house of Gar Nal, unless he had gone there in Gar Nal's absence in an attempt to steal some of his secrets; nor did I bother to question Rapas about it, as it did not seem of any great importance to me. It was enough that Fal Sivas was there, and that I should find him.

It was half after the eighth zode, or around midnight earth-time, that we reached Gar Nal's. Rapas admitted us and led us to the third level of the house, up narrow ramps at the rear of the building where we met no one. We moved silently without speaking, and at last our guide halted before a door.

"He is in there," he whispered.

"Open the door," I said.

He tried it, but it was locked. Ur Jan pushed him aside, and then hurled his great bulk against the door. With a loud splintering of wood, it burst in. I leaped across the threshold; and there, seated at a table, I saw Fal Sivas and Gar Nal—Gar Nal, the man whom I had thought to be imprisoned in the city of Ombra on the nearer moon.

As the two men recognized Ur Jan and me, they leaped to their feet; their evil faces were studies in surprise and terror.

I sprang forward and seized Gar Nal before he could draw his sword, and Ur Jan fell upon Fal Sivas. He would have killed him offhand, but I forbade it. All that I wanted was to learn the fate of Dejah Thoris, and one of these men must know the truth concerning her. They must not die until I knew.

"What are you doing here, Gar Nal?" I demanded. "I thought that you were a prisoner in Ombra."

"I escaped," he replied.

"Do you know where my princess is?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

A cunning look entered his eyes. "You would like to know, wouldn't you?" he asked with a sneer; "but do you think Gar Nal is fool enough to tell you? No, as long as I know and you don't, you will not dare to kill me."

"I'll get the truth out of him," growled Ur Jan. "Here, Rapas, heat a dagger for me. Heat it red-hot." But when we looked around, Rapas was not there. As we had entered the room, he had made good his escape.

"Well," said Ur Jan, "I can heat it myself; but first let me kill Fal Sivas."

"No, no," screamed the old inventor. "I did not steal the Princess of Helium; it was Gar Nal."

And then the two commenced to accuse one another, and presently I discovered that after Gar Nal's return from Thuria, these two master inventors and great scoundrels had patched up a truce and joined forces because of their mutual fear of me. Gar Nal was to hide Fal Sivas, and in return Fal Sivas was to show him the secret of his mechanical brain.

They had both been certain that the last place in the world that I would look for Fal Sivas would be in the house of Gar Nal. Gar Nal had instructed his servants to say that he had never returned from his trip with Ur Jan, giving the impression that he was still upon Thuria; and he was planning to leave that very night for a distant hiding-place.

But all this annoyed me. I did not care about them, or their plans. I wanted to know but one thing, and that was the fate of Dejah Thoris.

"Where is my princess, Gar Nal?" I demanded; "tell me that, and I will spare your life."

"She is still in Ombra," he replied.

Then I turned upon Fal Sivas. "That is your death warrant, Fal Sivas," I told him.

"Why?" he demanded. "What have I to do with it?"

"You keep me from directing the brain that operates your ship, and only thus may I reach Ombra."

Ur Jan raised his sword to cleave Fal Sivas's skull, but the coward went down upon his knees and begged for his life.

"Spare me," he cried, "and I will turn the ship over to you and let you control the brain."

"I can't trust you," I said.

"You can take me with you," he pleaded; "that will be better than death."

"Very well," I said; "but if you interfere with my plans or attempt to betray me, you shall pay for your treachery with your life."

I turned toward the door. "I am returning to Thuria tonight," I said to my companions. "I shall take Fal Sivas with me, and when I return with my princess (and I shall not return without her), I hope to be able to reward you in some material way for your splendid loyalty."

"I am going with you, my prince," said Jat Or; "and I ask for no reward."

"And I, too, am going," said Zanda.

"And I," growled Ur Jan, "but first, my prince, please let me run my sword through the heart of this scoundrel," and as he spoke he advanced upon Gar Nal.

"He should die for what he has done. He gave you his word, and he broke it."

I shook my head. "No," I said. "He told me where I could find my princess; and in return for that, I have guaranteed his safety."

Grumbling, Ur Jan returned his sword to its scabbard; and then

we four, with Fal Sivas, moved toward the door. The others preceded me. I was the last to pass out into the corridor; and just as I did so, I heard a door open at the opposite end of the room we were just leaving. I turned to glance back; and there, in the doorway across the room, stood Dejah Thoris.

She came toward me with arms outstretched as I ran to meet her.

She was breathing very hard and trembling as I took her in my arms. "Oh, my prince," she cried, "I thought I should not be in time. I heard all that was said in this room, but I was bound and gagged and could not warn you that Gar Nal was deceiving you. It was only just this instant that I succeeded in freeing myself."

My exclamation of surprise when I first saw her had attracted the attention of my companions, and they had all returned to the room; and as I held my princess in my arms, Ur Jan leaped past me and ran his sword through the putrid heart of Gar Nal.

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A Fighting Man of Mars, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*

A Fighting Man of Mars is an Edgar Rice Burroughs science fiction novel, the seventh of his famous Barsoom series. Burroughs began writing it on February 28, 1929, and the finished story was first published in Blue Book Magazine as a six-part serial in the issues for April to September, 1930. It was later published as a complete novel by Metropolitan in May, 1931.
The story is purportedly relayed back to earth via the Gridley Wave, a sort of super radio frequency previously introduced in Tanar of Pellucidar, the third of Burrough's Pellucidar novels, which thus provides a link between the two series. The story-teller is Ulysses Paxton, protagonist of the previous novel, The Master Mind of Mars, but this story is not about him; rather, it is the tale of Tan Hadron of Hastor, a lowly, poor padwar (a low-ranking officer) who is in

love with the beautiful, haughty Sanoma Tora, daughter of Tor Hatan, a minor but rich noble. As he is only a padwar, Sanoma spurns him. Then Sanoma Tora is kidnapped, and the novel moves into high gear.
(From Wikipedia)

The Warlord of Mars, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*

Old acquaintances, made in the two other stories, reappear: Tars Tarkas, Tardos Mors and others. There is a happy ending to the story in the union of the Warlord, the title conferred upon John Carter, with Dejah Thoris.

The Gods of Mars, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*

After the long exile on Earth, John Carter finally returned to his beloved Mars. But beautiful Dejah Thoris, the woman he loved, had vanished. Now he was trapped in the legendary Eden of Mars -- an Eden from which none ever escaped alive.

A Princess of Mars, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*

A Princess of Mars is an Edgar Rice Burroughs science fiction novel, the first of his famous Barsoom series. It is also Burroughs' first novel, predating his Tarzan stories. He wrote it between July and September 28, 1911, going through four working titles; initially, he was going to call it My First Adventure on Mars, then The Green Martians, Dejah Thoris, Martian Princess, and finally Under the Moons of Mars.
The finished story was first published under the last of these titles in All-Story as a six-part serial in the issues for February-July 1912. For the serial publication, the author's name was given as "Norman Bean"; Burroughs had chosen the pseudonym of "Normal Bean" as a type of pun stressing that he was in his right mind, being concerned he might suffer ridicule for writing such a fantastic story. The effect was spoiled when a typesetter changed "Normal" to "Norman" on the assumption that the former was a typographical error. The story was later published as a complete novel under the present title by A. C. McClurg in October 1917.
Full of swordplay and daring feats, the story is considered a classic example of 20th century pulp fiction.

Llana of Gathol, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*

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